WILLIAM JAMES AND THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

William James is often considered one of America's most original philosophical minds, while also a foundational thinker for the study of religion. Despite this reputation, he is rarely considered a serious philosopher or religious thinker by contemporary standards. In this new interpretation David Lamberth argues that James's major contribution was to develop a metaphysics of experience integrally related to his pluralistic and social religious ideas. Lamberth systematically interprets James's radically empiricist world-view and argues for an early dating (1895) for his development of this metaphysics. He offers a radically empiricist reading of *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and a close analysis of *A Pluralistic Universe*. Concluding, he connects James's ideas about experience, pluralism, and truth to current debates in philosophy, philosophy of religion, and theology, suggesting James's functional, experiential metaphysics as a conceptual aid in bridging the social and interpretive with the immediate and concrete, avoiding radical relativism and uncritical realism.

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Current events confirm the need to understand religious ideas and institutions critically, yet radical doubts have been raised about how to proceed and about the ideal of critical thought itself. Meanwhile, some prominent scholars have urged that we turn the tables, and view modern society as the object of criticism and a religious tradition as the basis for critique. Cambridge Studies in Religion and Critical Thought is a series of books intended to address the interaction of critical thinking and religious traditions in this context of uncertainty and conflicting claims. It will take up questions such as the following, either by reflecting on them philosophically or by pursuing their ramifications in studies of specific figures and movements: is a coherent critical perspective on religion desirable or even possible? What sort of relationship to religious tradition ought a critic to have? What, if anything, is worth saving from the Enlightenment legacy or from critics of religion like Hume and Feuerbach? The answers offered, while varied, will uniformly constitute distinguished, philosophically informed, and critical analyses of particular religious topics.

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To my mother and father

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Note on the text

In this book I refer whenever possible to the Harvard University Press edition *The Works of William James*, edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas Skrupskelis, citing the volumes' presentations of manuscripts as well as references to letters and notes in appendices and the apparatus. When referring to other letters or manuscripts, I cite the most accessible published location of the complete item. In a few cases references are made to manuscripts in the Papers of William James at Harvard's Houghton Library.

The *Works* edition is arranged topically rather than chronologically, and a great deal of the material presented therein was never prepared for publication by James, much less topically arranged. In order to advance the historical interests of my argument, I have adopted certain additional conventions regarding citations. If an article or work was published by James in the same form and under the same name as it is presented in the Harvard *Works* edition, I refer to it in my notes by the *Works* volume title alone. For example, I refer to articles in *The Meaning of Truth* simply by that title (with a page number), rather than by article name, even though James previously published many of them serially. On the other hand, in the case of uncollected essays, manuscripts, and notes, and in the specific case of all of the essays that Perry collected posthumously in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, I refer both to the article (or item) title and to the *Works* volume. This allows individuals without the *Works* edition to find many items in other sources (such as the popular *Memories and Studies*). It also preserves access and perhaps even draws attention to both James's own intellectual history and his authorial considerations about publication.

The first reference to a work in the footnotes includes full publication information. All subsequent references are by author and abbreviated title. Full publication information for all works is included in the select bibliography.

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Introduction

> It is curious how little countenance radical pluralism has ever had from philosophers. Whether materialistically or spiritualistically minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world apparently is filled. They have substituted economical and orderly conceptions for the first sensible tangle; and whether these were morally elevated or only intellectually neat, they were at any rate aesthetically pure and definite, and aimed at ascribing to the world something clean and intellectual in the way of inner structure. As compared with all these rationalizing pictures, the pluralistic empiricism which I profess offers but a sorry appearance. It is a turbid, muddled, gothic sort of affair, without a sweeping outline and with little pictorial nobility. Those of you who are accustomed to the classical constructions of reality may be excused if your first reaction upon it be absolute contempt – a shrug of the shoulders, as if such ideas were unworthy of explicit refutation. But one must have lived some time with a system to appreciate its merits. Perhaps a little more familiarity may mitigate your first surprise at such a program as I offer.
>
> William James[1]

On 4 May 1908 at Manchester College, Oxford, William James approached the podium to begin the first of his eight Hibbert Lectures on Metaphysics. At the height of his international fame as a philosopher, James was also in declining health. Although he had retired from his official duties at Harvard University, he had accepted the lectureship with the idea of striking a mortal blow to absolute idealism, his chief philosophical rival throughout his long and varied academic career. The lectures, titled "The Present Situation in Philosophy," seek instead to advance James's own systematic, pluralistic position – known most frequently by the name of "radical empiricism." Repeated that summer

[1] William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 26.

at Harvard, they were the last major public presentation James made before his death in 1910.

James's rhetorically self-deprecating comparison between the world-view of absolute idealism and that of his own pluralistic empiricism indicates a great deal both about James's own view itself and about the difficulties and benefits attendant on one who considers it seriously. The passing of almost nine decades has rendered unfamiliar – and perhaps even strange – the "classical, aesthetically pure" perspective of absolute idealism that James presumes for his audience. James's own "turbid, muddled, gothic . . . affair" is, however, most likely no less difficult to comprehend now than it was at the beginning of the century. And, while our contemporary philosophical constructions of the world may admit of less sweep and possibly less pictorial nobility than those of absolute idealism, most of them still substitute rather "economical and orderly conceptions for the first sensory tangle." We too, then, may be excused if we shrug our shoulders at first in reaction to James's unfamiliar presentations. If we are to have any opportunity to benefit from the potential insights and advantages of James's view, or even to gain a deeper understanding of it, however, we must take his advice and live for some time with his system. In this book, I propose to do just that.

This interpretation derives its central, interpretive strategy from James's mature self-characterization to his audience at Oxford in 1908, where he treated his own ideas as together constituting a single system, which he characterized as both a "radical pluralism" and a "pluralistic empiricism," and eventually referred to collectively as "radical empiricism."[2] This "system," he admits, is not familiar philosophically in the sense of being neat and tidy – intellectually, aesthetically, and morally "pure"; it is instead, as James says, "gothic." But just as the cathedral of Chartres admits of an integrated logic where dissimilar components buttress and complement one another in a total expressive, functional, and beautiful whole, so too James's radical empiricism must be taken to admit of both a functional and, in some sense, a rational and aesthetic integration. Gaining insight into that pluralistic whole is, above all, the aim of this endeavor.

There are a number of claims that this study seeks to advance. Perhaps the most general, at least from the perspective of James studies, is the

[2] See ibid., pp. 20, 26.

thesis that James's mature philosophical view is most adequately represented by the integrated, radically empiricist, pluralistically panpsychist position indicated most clearly in his last completed major work, *A Pluralistic Universe*. What I seek to demonstrate is that James's integrated view is best understood as beginning with radical empiricism – as traditionally understood from the perspective of the posthumously collected *Essays in Radical Empiricism* – and including pragmatism. More importantly, however, James's world-view must also be taken to incorporate several crucial modifications to these more familiar views: namely, a modified and expanded notion of rationality on a spectrum between intimacy and foreignness, and a moderately panpsychist interpretation of reality that allows for the possibility of superhuman (or "supernatural") entities or activities. On my reading it is probably better to refer to James's overall view as "radical empiricism" rather than "pragmatism," but it is also crucial to take this radical empiricism to include several critical refinements to the views familiar from *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

To advance the details of this general thesis about what "the centre of his vision" is, in the first four chapters that follow I consider James's writings and manuscripts from the last two decades of his life.[3] This period witnessed the explicit development of his radical empiricism and his pragmatism, as well as the publication of almost all of his works on philosophy and religion. In forwarding my most general argument, I offer an interpretation of James's evolving and mature thought as well as a close reading of a number of his texts and manuscripts from both a systematic and an historical perspective. In particular, I attend to the early development of James's radical empiricism, the involvement of his metaphysical views in his *magnum opus* on religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and the interrelationship – even interdependence – between his mature philosophical views and his understanding of and interest in religion. The principal interpretive aim is to comprehend James's philosophical views in greater systematic and historical detail, and to understand in particular how and why his views about religion are so thoroughly involved in his philosophical *Weltanschauung*. After this reconstructive task, in the final chapter I forward the insights gleaned from this rethinking of James into contemporary discussions in philosophy, religion, and theology, focusing

[3] For the "centre of vision" comment, see ibid., p. 44, as well as the letter to Miss S—, 26 May 1900, in William James, *The Letters of William James*, Henry James (ed.), 2 vols. (Boston, Mass.: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1920), vol. II, p. 355.

in particular on the value of his radical metaphysics of experience for these discourses at the end of the twentieth century.

As Hegel so perceptively observes in the introduction to his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, one of the most difficult problems for a philosophical investigation is the problem of the beginning.[4] Where does one find oneself beginning? Does one begin with enough successfully to proceed toward the goal set out, yet without presuming too much? Taking a cue from James's interest in the "big blooming buzzing confusion" of concrete experience, in chapter 1 my argument begins *in medias res* with a systematic account of James's radical empiricism as articulated (primarily) in the articles of 1904–5 that were published posthumously as *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (edited by R. B. Perry).[5] This beginning is in the middle of things in several ways. Historically, the moment of 1904–5 marks a place somewhere near the center of both the temporal span of my book and the productive public career of James. In terms of content the 1904–5 position also marks a middle point from the perspective of my discussion, since I eventually explore both how James arrives at the view represented at that time and how he subsequently refines and alters it.

The 1904–5 series of essays has several advantages as a point of departure. First, it is the most explicit and detailed metaphysical discussion James ever published. As a result, it is also the most familiar of James's metaphysical reflections to readers of his work. Finally, it also serves as the basis for the mature pluralistically panpsychist view that I seek to explicate and underscore in this book. The 1904–5 presentation of radical empiricism is where most readers do in fact find themselves beginning with James's metaphysical views; fortunately, as a starting point it provides enough material with which to proceed.

In my discussion in chapter 1, I differentiate James's radical empiricism into seven doctrines or components, unfolding in a systematic manner the content of the accounts and explicating in some detail the interrelationship among them. These are: (1) the methodological thesis of radical empiricism tying philosophy to the experienceable; (2) the factual thesis that relations are themselves part of experience; (3) the metaphysical thesis of pure experience; (4) the functional doctrine of direct acquaintance (immediate knowing); (5) the functional account of

4 G. W. F. Hegel, *Logic*, William Wallace (tr.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), §1.

5 James also calls immediate experience "much-at-onceness." See William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 32.

knowledge about (conceptual knowing); (6) the pragmatic conception of truth; and (7) the thesis of pluralistic panpsychism. Chapter 1 is the most philosophically complex of the book, and thus is rather challenging as a beginning for the reader. Since the goal is to gain insight into James's rather unfamiliar philosophical view of the world, becoming accustomed to his terminology and ideas is of critical importance. The analysis of chapter 1 thus facilitates the following chapters' discussions of the development of James's views and the possibilities and problems such a view encounters.

With the systematic account in place, in chapter 2 I turn back to the 1890s to consider the historical development of James's radically empiricist way of thinking. Beginning with the conclusions to the 1890 *Principles of Psychology*, I first trace James's shift in interest from psychology as a natural science to philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular. Through a close analysis of texts and manuscripts from 1895, I demonstrate that James embraced the majority of the distinctive components of radical empiricism by that year as he began to explore the possibility of a formally monistic metaphysics that sets aside mind/body dualism. Further, I consider in some detail the apparent origins of James's thesis of "pure experience," which is central to radical empiricism, tracing and assessing its overt connections to the work of Richard Avenarius. Finally, I explore James's "field theory of consciousness," which appears prominently in his 1901–2 Gifford Lectures and is usually associated exclusively with the dualism of his psychology. I argue that this theory is, in fact, also central to James's formally monistic interests, and is intimately related to the central philsophical ideas of radical empiricism espoused in 1895–6.

Chapter 3 is principally concerned with the most successful of James's published works, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, comprising his Gifford Lectures from 1901–2. In contrast to the familiar, psychological reading of *Varieties*, on which philosophical questions about religion are merely circumscribed if not also overshadowed by James's empirical investigations and classifications, I offer an overtly philosophical reading of the text. The chapter begins with an historical reconstruction of James's experience of writing his Giffords, considering his unfulfilled plans and manuscripts for the lectures with an eye toward his intentions for the philosophical course that was never actually written. Following that is the philosophical reading of the lectures, which attends in particular to the aspects of James's view of religion that are consistent with and even dependent on radical empiricism and its thesis of

pure experience (shown in chapter 2 to have preceded *Varieties* in formulation). Finding that James does in fact construct his model of religious experience (conversion and mystical experience in particular) in line with the radically empiricist "field theory" of consciousness from 1895, this philosophical reading elucidates James's rather puzzling text on religious experience. Furthermore, it offers a more thorough, philosophical understanding of James's view of religion, and specifies more clearly the relationship of his self-styled "piecemeal supernaturalism" to his broader, philosophical project.

In chapter 4, after briefly charting the course of James's work since *Varieties*, I turn to his 1908 Hibbert Lectures on "The Present Situation in Philosophy," both to explicate the critical refinements to his 1904–5 statement of radical empiricism and to explore in greater detail the interconnections of his mature philosophical view with his understanding of religion. At once a commentary on the text of *A Pluralistic Universe* and a systematic analysis of James's refined radical empiricism (also called "a pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe"), this discussion has several purposes. First, it illuminates his understanding of the practice and goals of philosophy and explicates his inclusive, pluralistic conception of rationality, paying particular attention to his proposal to understand rationality in terms of "intimacy." Second, the treatment considers in detail James's philosophical and temperamental reasons for preferring a pluralistic, empiricist view of the world to the rationalistic option presented by absolute idealism. Finally, the analysis demonstrates and clarifies James's engagement of a form of panpsychism, relating his endorsement of a pluralistically panpsychic version of radical empiricism to his interpretation of religious experience presented but not fully explained in *Varieties*. The outcome for the reader is a greater familiarity with and appreciation of James's complete *Weltanschauung* in a more systematic and in-depth manner, as well as a detailed recognition of the central involvement of his views on religion with his philosophical program.

Chapter 5 turns from James's own historical period to the contemporary setting, seeking to bridge this reconsideration of James with contemporary debates in philosophy, religion, and theology. In the first section of the final chapter I revisit the question of pragmatism and truth, situating my understanding of James in contemporary neopragmatic debates on realism and antirealism in particular, and clarifying my interpretation of James on the relativity of truth. This portion therefore fills out the brief treatment of truth in chapter 1, and clarifies

my reading of the truth question in relation to James's mature view. The second half of the chapter takes a broader and thus more suggestive perspective, seeking to anticipate the contributions that reconsidering a Jamesian metaphysics of experience might make to three contemporary fields in the academy: philosophy, the philosophy of religion, and theology. With respect to philosophy in general, I argue that James's turn to minimalistic metaphysical reflection based on radical empiricism's notion of experience could both reorient our contemporary conception of the tasks of philosophy and contribute to and fruitfully alter some of the terms of debates in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics in particular. Turning to the philosophy of religion, I consider the value of James's radical empiricism for discussions of religious experience, arguing that his experiential turn provides a middle way between contemporary apologetic and skeptical projects regarding experience as a basis for religious belief. I also evaluate the prospects for changing the debate as it is currently cast between theistic, often naive, realist positions and those of more hermeneutically sophisticated, but ultimately reductive, naturalisms. Finally, with respect to theology I argue that James's social rendering of reality and the divine critically reinvigorates the possibilities for developing a viable spiritualistic yet empirically minded world-view. The advantage of James's view, I contend, is that it is capable theoretically of comprehending the deep, systemic insights into social processes such as those advanced in contemporary studies of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, while at the same time correlating them critically to the more intimate religious and moral interests by which we as human beings are animated. Critical metaphysical thinking, on this reading, is cast as a theological, moral, and fundamentally spiritualistic exercise, whether about knowledge, reality, society, or the relations among human beings and the divine.

CHAPTER 1

James's radically empiricist "Weltanschauung"

Although William James is best known today for his association with American pragmatism, in the later and most prolific years of his life he was more apt to characterize his central philosophical interest as the advancement of "radical empiricism," a metaphysical *Weltanschauung* of his own invention. In the 1909 preface to *The Meaning of Truth*, James appealed to radical empiricism as the principal justification for his continued concern with the maelstrom of pragmatist and anti-pragmatist warfare, writing:

> I am interested in another doctrine in philosophy to which I give the name of radical empiricism, and it seems to me that the establishment of the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail.[1]

Although numerous works have taken radical empiricism seriously since James's death, little attention has been devoted to the development of the view in his work prior to the flurry of articles that introduced radical empiricism to James's philosophical contemporaries in 1904–5.[2]

In chapter 2 I seek to redress that oversight, detailing James's turn from psychology to metaphysics in the early 1890s and demonstrating that the bulk of James's metaphysical ideas date, in significantly developed form, from as early as 1895. Before moving to that historical account, in this chapter I offer a relatively brief, systematic analysis of James's radical empiricism in order to provide a basis for the discussions

[1] William James, *The Meaning of Truth*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 6.

[2] Ignas Skrupskelis's introduction to William James, *Manuscript Lectures*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. lxiii, and John McDermott's introduction to William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. xxi–xxv, are both exceptions to this claim. However, each of these treatments only suggests what should be considered in taking up the genesis of James's radical empiricism, rather than making much headway on the project.

of the rest of the book. My analysis in this chapter is based predominantly on the articles of 1904–5. Although certain important details of James's conceptions change or are developed before his death (a fact frequently overlooked, which is in part the subject of chapter 4), the 1904–5 presentation is both the most familiar and the most detailed discussion of the view that James published. It is thus a reasonable benchmark for the purposes of establishing my claims about the earlier development of his metaphysical ideas, as well as a solid basis for exploring later changes in his views. Notwithstanding the fact that historical development is not the subject of this chapter, I begin with a brief consideration of several of James's explicit promises to develop a radically empiricist metaphysics prior to 1904 to set the view in context.

RADICAL EMPIRICISM: A PHILOSOPHY OF PURE EXPERIENCE

James's interest in producing a systematic metaphysics was no secret among his contemporaries. In fact, in 1903 F. C. S. Schiller, in the preface to his *Humanism*, cast himself as the baptist to James's messiah:

> It seemed therefore not impolitic, and even imperative, to keep up the agitation for a more hopeful and *humaner* view of metaphysics, and at the same time to herald the coming of what will doubtless be an epochmaking work, viz. William James's promised *Metaphysics*.[3]

Schiller was to be disappointed at least in one sense, for although James held out the hope of writing a fully systematic work for the last ten years of his life, he never managed to produce such a text.[4] Schiller and his contemporaries could not have been too dismayed, however, for within a year of Schiller's trumpet call, James made quite a splash in the pages of *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* with his bombastic metaphysical query, "Does Consciousness Exist?"

Surprisingly, James's highly rhetorical introduction of his metaphysical ideas does not even mention the term "radical empiricism." Instead, the operative conception in the article is James's thesis of pure experience,

[3] F. C. S. Schiller, *Humanism*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. xiii.

[4] James's first clear intimations about such a work appear in the remains of and comments concerning his plan for his Gifford Lectures. See the letter from James to Frances R. Morse, 23 December 1899, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 112. James had also clearly intimated such plans to Schiller, as indicated by his comment after *Varieties* was out that "The Gifford Lectures are all facts and no philosophy." See James to F. C. S. Schiller, 20 April 1902, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 165. Chapter 3 provides a more complete discussion of the conception and history of James's Gifford Lectures.

his alternative to what he takes to be a (if not the) crucial mistake in various empiricisms and philosophies of the absolute – the presupposition of both the "substantiality" of consciousness and the fundamental duality of subject and object, mind and matter. In the next issue of the *Journal*, dated only twenty-eight days later, James published the sequel, "A World of Pure Experience," in which, notwithstanding the title, he bestowed the name "radical empiricism" on his *Weltanschauung* as a whole.[5]

James's appellation "radical empiricism" in this second article is not, in fact, completely novel, although the specificity he gives it is. "Radical empiricism" first appeared in print in the 1896 preface to *The Will to Believe*, as a characterization of James's "philosophical attitude":

> Were I obliged to give a short name to the attitude in question, I should call it that of *radical empiricism*, in spite of the fact that such brief nicknames are nowhere more misleading than in philosophy. I say "empiricism," because it is contented to regard its most assured conclusions concerning matters of fact as hypotheses liable to modification in the course of future experience; and I say "radical," because it treats the doctrine of monism itself as an hypothesis, and, unlike so much of the half-way empiricism that is current under the name of positivism or agnosticism or scientific naturalism, it does not dogmatically affirm monism as something with which all experience has got to square.[6]

From the perspective of the articles of 1904–5, one could recognize quite a bit of the metaphysics of radical empiricism in this quotation, especially in its focus on the "course of future experience." However, from the vantage of the text itself, the most salient feature of James's attitude of radical empiricism is its methodological bent. In this passage James allies himself not just with philosophical empiricism generally, but with the methodological empiricism of modern science in which rational conclusions are both seen as hypotheses and put to the test experimentally, ever subject to eventual falsification.

The second interesting point in this quotation is that James applies his methodology not only to matters of fact, that is, to conclusions and ideas about things that could obviously be met with in the course of experience, but also to broader, more fundamental organizing questions or meta-ideas, such as the presupposition of monism or pluralism. Previous philosophical empiricisms viewed these meta-ideas as prior to (transcendent of) experience, and therefore subject only to rational

[5] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22.

[6] William James, *The Will to Believe*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 5.

arbitration, skeptical though it might be. From James's methodological attitude introduced in the preface to *The Will to Believe*, however, it appears that no conceptions, regardless of their scope, may be allowed completely to transcend the testing ground of experience.

This early formulation in *The Will to Believe*, slight though it is, did not escape notice; in fact, on the basis of this one reference, Schiller allies his humanism, with its emphasis on the human origin of knowledge, completely with James's project.[7] James evoked his notion of "radical empiricism" directly in print in only one other instance prior to the publication of "A World of Pure Experience." In a review of Henry Sturt's *Personal Idealism* in the January 1903 issue of *Mind*, James wrote:

> I think that the important thing to recognise is that we have here a distinct new departure in contemporary thought, the combination, namely, of a teleological and spiritual inspiration with the same kind of conviction that the particulars of experience constitute the stronghold of analogy as has usually characterised the materialistic type of mind. If empiricism is to be radical it must indeed admit the concrete data of experience in their full completeness. The only fully concrete data are, however, the successive moments of our several histories, taken with their subjective personal aspect, as well as their "objective" deliverance or "content." After the analogy of these moments of experiences must all complete reality be conceived. Radical empiricism thus leads to the assumption of a collectivism of personal lives (which may be of any grade of complication, and superhuman or infrahuman as well as human), variously cognitive of each other, variously conative and impulsive, genuinely evolving and changing by effort and trial, and by their interaction and cumulative achievements making up the world . . . It is to be hoped . . . that a systematic all-round statement of it may erelong appear. I know of no more urgent philosophic desideratum of the present day.[8]

Where *The Will to Believe* presentation was rather limited in scope, this comment is obviously suggestive of a wider metaphysical view. James recapitulates his methodological limitation that experience is to reign supreme as the guarantor for philosophical conceptions; however,

[7] Schiller, *Humanism*, p. xxiv. This is not a mistake given the content that James had specified in *The Will to Believe*; however, it does seem premature once James presents the bulk of his philosophical view in 1904–5. James's methodological notion of subjecting all conceptions to testing within experience squares well with Schiller's interpretation of Protagoras' dictum that "man is the measure of all things."

[8] William James, "Review of Henry Sturt's *Personal Idealism*," *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 544–5. Incidentally, this passage also indicates a clear panpsychist orientation.

in this discussion his attention is focused primarily on what must be included *in* experience, rather than what radical empiricism's methodological stricture excludes.[9]

James's language here is reminiscent of his definition of a "full fact" or a "concrete bit of personal experience" in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, i.e., "a conscious field *plus* its object as felt or thought of *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs."[10] The most notable difference is that where *Varieties* seems to focus on the subjective elements, mentioning only "a conscious field" as the potentially objective component, in this discussion James focuses more on objectivity, speaking of the "'objective' deliverance or 'content'" of the concrete data of experience, and characterizing the subjective element as only an "aspect." Additionally, where in *Varieties* these concrete experiences, while real, are conceded to be only "insignificant bits," in this review James has the concrete data of experience, complete with their personal aspects, collectively "making up the world." Clearly, something much more developed than merely a methodological restriction to experience is afoot.

Although James characterizes the whole of his philosophical world-view as "radical empiricism" in 1896 and 1904, in the years following until his death he is more apt to limit the expression "radical empiricism" to a narrower claim, employing other characterizations for his world-view, such as his use of "pluralism" or "a pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe" in *A Pluralistic Universe*.[11] James's philosophical world-view, however it be denoted, is in fact composed of several distinguishable doctrines. Though he articulates them as parts of a coherent overall view, certain of the notions could conceivably be held or rejected in variant combinations.

In the analysis that follows I distinguish the components of James's composite view, referring to the whole either as his philosophical

[9] In a passage that I excluded James does excoriate various monists for their arbitrary inclusion of the absolute, but the emphasis remains as I detail it here.

[10] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 393.

[11] The text of *A Pluralistic Universe* is quite interesting, as well as confusing, in this respect, for James uses "radical empiricism" at times to mean the whole view articulated in that text, and at other times to mean either the narrower methodological claim or his claim about relations being given in experience. Cf. James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 20, 126, 147. See also his restricted usages in the introduction to William James, *Pragmatism*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 6, and the preface to *Meaning of Truth*, pp. 6–7. Interestingly, the term "radical empiricism" does not even appear in the unfinished manuscript for *Some Problems of Philosophy*.

Weltanschauung or as a specifically named variation thereof.[12] The components to be distinguished are: (1) the *methodological* thesis (or postulate) of radical empiricism that only, and yet all, experienceable constructions be admitted in philosophy; (2) the *factual* thesis of radical empiricism that relations are themselves a part of experience; (3) the *metaphysical* thesis of pure experience; (4) the *functional* doctrine of direct acquaintance, or immediate knowing; (5) the *functional* account of knowledge about, or conceptual knowing; and (6) the *pragmatic* conception of truth. Although in 1904 James explicitly avoids discussion of it, one should also add: (7) the thesis of *pluralistic* panpsychism.[13]

The methodological thesis of radical empiricism

In addition to the *Will to Believe* passage, in his published works James explains what he means by radical empiricism in two locations: the 1904 essay "A World of Pure Experience" and the 1909 preface to *The Meaning of Truth*. In 1904, James begins by further explicating the commitment to empiricism evidenced in the introduction to *The Will to Believe*. He writes:

> Empiricism is known as the opposite of rationalism. Rationalism tends to emphasize universals and to make wholes prior to parts in the order of logic as well as in that of being. Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. My description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order.[14]

In discussing empiricism here James certainly means to be further aligning himself with the method of science and its fallibility thesis. In this passage, however, he also declares his allegiance to a form of philosophy that emphasizes the parts and the individual over the logic

[12] As mentioned above, I do not mean by this to elide the significant evolutions of James's overall philosophical vision; rather, I shall distinguish them contextually according to date and work. Thus I might refer to the view of *A Pluralistic Universe* as James's "pluralistic panpsychism" in contradistinction to the view of 1904. While the fact that there are several evolutions in James's metaphysical thought is commonly recognized (e.g., by Sprigge and Ford), this work seeks to offer a more complete justification of the detail of and reasons for the shifts.

[13] See James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 43. This view, which becomes a crucial refinement of his 1904–5 statement, is discussed in more detail below in chapter 4.

[14] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22.

of rationalism, with its emphasis on universals.[15] This commitment is a step beyond the attitude he articulated in *The Will to Believe*, where he admitted merely to treating the absolute as an hypothesis. James's empiricism is, apparently, to be a full-blooded one.

This emphasis on particularity and James's correlative fallibilistic view of conceptual entities and claims is, as James himself notes, not radically different from Hume's and his followers' empiricisms and their skepticism toward universals and conceptual aggregates. Where James's empiricism diverges from the empiricist canon and becomes radical, however, is in its thoroughgoing interpretation of what we might call Berkeley's empirico-idealistic principle – that a thing's *esse* is *percipi*.[16] While James's reformulation of Berkeley's principle in terms of experience rather than perception is significant, the overt shift that makes James's empiricism *radical* is his application of empiricism's axiom not only as an *exclusive* principle, but also as an *inclusive* one.[17] Thus James writes in 1904 that, "To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced,

[15] This characterization of the difference between empiricism and rationalism is one of which James grows fonder and fonder. See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 9, and *Some Problems of Philosophy*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 24.

[16] Berkeley's formulation is not exactly coordinate with that of Hume, much less Locke. It serves here to represent the commonality of empiricisms (broadly taken) methodologically with regard to the prioritization of sensation. I have not translated Berkeley's Latin, preferring to retain the ambiguity in the Latin between "being," "existence," and "to be" which is lost when rendered in English.

[17] James's shift from perception to experience in the empiricist's principle is occasioned by his recognition of the inherently unitary character of perception as a conceptual unit of analysis, as opposed to the inherently relational character of experience. The empiricisms of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume are founded on "perception," a direct and exclusive relation between ideas and object via the senses, derived from the Latin *percipio* – to lay hold of or seize. "Experience" is employed infrequently by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, but the meaning in their usages is closely akin to that of the Latin *experientia* – knowledge gained by experiment, or trial, over time. Perception on this view does not necessarily involve contextual relations among things or ideas, such as temporal or spatial order, while experience does. Kant's usage and conception of *Erfahrung*, and its translation into English as "experience," emphasizes even further the contextual complexity of experience, as well as raising problems for the empiricists concerning their conceptions of perceptive certainty. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith (tr.) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), pp. B1–2; B218. Already toward the end of *The Principles of Psychology*, James favors the notion of experience over perception because of its inherently complex, contextual character; see William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.), 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 1217–26. James's observation also compares favorably with what C. S. Peirce has to say in 1905 when he characterizes experience as an event. See Peirce, "The Principles of Phenomenology," *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, Justus Buchler (ed.) (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 88.

nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced."[18] Locke, Hume, Berkeley, James Mill, and John S. Mill had all attended rather well to the exclusive criterion, discarding elements that were not apparently derived from perception or experience. None of them were radical empiricists, James argues, since they all felt no serious compunction about leaving out certain elements that had also appeared through perception or experience, thereby setting aside the inclusive requirement James sees as implicit in the principle of empiricism.

James's methodological principle of radical empiricism relies on the as yet unspecified criterion of being "directly experienced," a notion which, as it turns out, is crucial both metaphysically and epistemologically to his wider world-view.[19] Close attention to James's 1904 formulation of the methodological principle of radical empiricism, however, raises a more immediate problem, one independent of whatever he might mean by being "directly experienced." When taken strictly, his statement appears to indicate that anything not *in fact* directly experienced by someone must be excluded from philosophical discussion.[20] Historical and temporal issues aside, this limitation would no doubt bar a significant number of the uncontroversial objects of both science and philosophy, among them entities and objects that are unexperienceable merely by virtue of technical or circumstantial limitations.[21]

One of the more difficult and pressing problems for understanding James's radically empiricist *Weltanschauung* as a whole concerns the terms "experience" and "experienced" themselves. What he means by "experienced" in his statement above, as well as by "experience" in his thesis of pure experience, has been a subject of great debate among his interpreters, with no real consensus emerging. A number of different interpretations have been suggested, ranging from a variety of phenomenalist and panpsychist interpretations, in which to be experienced might mean to have an actual experiencer, or to be experienced by something, or even to be self-experiencing, to a rather moderate and

[18] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22.

[19] See pp. 25–43 below for further discussion on James's notion of direct experience.

[20] Berkeley's view has a similar consequence, in which non-thinking things depend on being perceived for their existence. James's 1904 formulation inherits this problem honestly from Berkeley, but it also entertains it as part of James's continuing consideration of panpsychism. See chapter 4 for more detail.

[21] Many objects of science and history are, of course, not directly experienceable, such as subatomic particles and personages long since deceased. See pp. 48–57 below on pragmatism for more on the status of these objects.

inclusive methodological interpretation, in which "experienced" means to be experienceable or describable in terms of experience.[22]

Although he is unclear in 1904, James is not ultimately unaware of this problem. In 1909, when he recapitulates his methodological principle in *The Meaning of Truth*, he introduces significantly more nuance, calling this notion the "postulate" of radical empiricism. "[T]he only things that shall be debatable among philosophers," he writes, "shall be things definable in terms drawn from experience."[23] Where in 1904 he excluded anything "not directly experienced," here he settles on the more formal and expansive criterion of being "*definable* in terms *drawn from* experience" (my italics). Experience, on this formulation, serves as the substrate or source for the various sorts of philosophical entities and elements allowable in a radically empiricist philosophy, and as such functions as a password for entry into James's *Weltanschauung*.

This later formulation gets to the heart of James's methodological concern, for it excludes those elements that transcend experience in principle, rather than by circumstance, while leaving open the door to include everything that occurs within or at the level of experience. As they have traditionally been understood, transcendent entities – such as God, the all-knower, the soul, the transcendental ego, or for that matter the absolute Truth – cannot be met within experience, for, it is argued, they are at once that which underlies it and makes it possible, while nonetheless not appearing within it. It is precisely these entities or elements that are barred from philosophical discussion by James because, as a matter of their very definition, they are fundamentally *incompatible* with experience. Understood in this manner, the restriction of philosophy to the terms and field of experience, in both its inclusive and exclusive formulations, is James's most basic methodological principle.

[22] There are numerous variations in between these, as well as variations, for example, within interpretations classifiable as either phenomenalist or panpsychist. In what follows I argue for the interpretation that seems most reasonable, given James's texts and the development of his thought that this study is tracing. This involves interpreting James's thesis methodologically along moderate, inclusive lines, while nonetheless attending (in chapter 4) to the developing metaphysical (and ultimately pluralistically panpsychist) leanings of James's understanding of what a philosophy of experience requires. For more detail, see pp. 57–8 below, and the discussion in chapter 4 of pluralistic panpsychism. Interestingly, R. B. Perry declares this issue (broadly construed) to be undecided, and perhaps ultimately indeterminate. See Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1935), vol. II, p. 666.

[23] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 6. For an interesting discussion of the import of James's use of "postulate," see Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860–1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 159–80.

The factual thesis of radical empiricism

Closely related to the methodological thesis of radical empiricism is what James in 1909 calls radical empiricism's "statement of fact." "For such a philosophy," he writes in 1904, "*the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system.*"[24] In explicitly incorporating relations under the rubric of experience, James is doing at least two things. First, he is directly opposing the reigning philosophical view of relations shared by rationalists (Hegelians and neo-Kantians, in this case) and empiricists alike.[25] On this view, while the particular determinate qualities of objects are given in experience, all of the relations among these same qualities or percepts are supplied *ex post facto* by the mind or consciousness which is the subject of these same experiences.[26] Depending on whether one is an empiricist or rationalist at heart, relations are either accorded lesser or greater philosophical respect than the determinate content of the experience itself. James's view, taking its cue from the methodological thesis of radical empiricism, considers all relations as coordinate parts of experience, and therefore as neither more nor less important in principle than other aspects of experience, be they other relations or contents. As James puts it in 1909, focusing on philosophers' disregard of conjunctive relations in particular: "the relations between things, conjunctive as well as disjunctive, are just as much matters of direct, particular experience, neither more so nor less so, than the things themselves."[27]

Relations, for James, are determinations of varying kinds and degrees that hold between and among particular contents of experience taken as a whole. As such, relations are inherently involved in making possible both the particular individual and whatever whole or wholes there might in fact be. In lecture 7 of *Pragmatism*, where James is obviously speaking consistently with his radical empiricism without so naming it, he distinguishes two subclasses of given relations: those that are "mutable

[24] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22.

[25] They are *neo*-Kantian in particular, in this case, since Kant's conception of knowledge is inherently relational (and in a different sense).

[26] James does not mean that all relations are given, and thus that no new relations are added by the knowing mind or can be made in the world of fact; on the contrary, he intends to claim that when new relations are made, they appear, or are enacted, at the level of experience, or fact, themselves. In other words, on James's view agents work directly on the world of fact, as well as merely experiencing it.

[27] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 7.

and accidental" and those that are "fixed and essential."[28] In the former class are the range of variable relations of *proximity* – temporal, spatial, and, we might add, mental (having to do with "accidental" mental association in the stream of experience). All of these relations are in principle variable, though in any real experience they are, in fact, fixed. The second class of relations identified by James comprises relations of likeness and unlikeness, similarity and difference – relations that span an infinite range of possible comparison, but which concern not proximity but rather the non-mutable factual characteristics of the things involved. In other words, the character of any of these relations is determined solely by the particular contents of the experiences related. Both particulars and wholes depend on these two sorts of relations for their very identity, their factuality, and certainly their reality.[29]

As contingent and specific as our experience tells us relations are, it still seems highly implausible to James that all the differentiations of relation could actually be produced by the mind, rather than being as much a part of the object as any other quality or content. On James's view the "immutable" sort of relation is in fact constitutive of whatever we call a content, making it distinguishable through its likeness to and difference from other contents.[30] Thus at least some relations must be "given" coordinately with (that is, have the same status as) other determinations of a particular perception or experience in order for anything to be given at all.

When discussing relations, James makes an interesting suggestion about the predominance of discontinuity in philosophical understandings of the universe. Both rationalism and empiricism share this bias, in

[28] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 118. James restricts this discussion of relations to those which hold between our sensations or their copies in our minds. The characterization is, however, completely comprehensible when the terms of radical empiricism are substituted, with perceptual "pure experiences" (or direct acquaintances) standing in for sensation, and conceptual "pure experiences" (or knowledge about) standing in for James's mental copies. See below in this chapter for further discussion of this dynamic.

[29] This discussion cannot help but raise the specter of either panpsychism or the all-knower, given that relations between terms seem to many philosophers (though not, as we shall see, to James) to involve the necessity of being related (transitively) by an agent. This is a crucial issue for James, one which is, in fact, a major subject for this study. See pp. 57–8 below on James's pluralistic panpsychism, as well as chapter 4, for in-depth discussion of how James handles this. Suffice it to say here that James outlaws the all-knower on the basis of both logic and his radical empiricism, and only engages panpsychism in a moderate and, interestingly, Hegelian fashion.

[30] This is an interesting parallel to Hegel's conception of particularity, which depends on an active sort of differentiation for its constitution. Contemporary conceptions of difference, coming through Saussure's structuralism, owe a great debt to this insight, and thus also find significant analogy in James.

that each sees the necessity of an additional force to unify the discontinuous into a world or at least a mind or individual: for rationalism, it is spirit, God, or the all-knower; for empiricism, the aggregating mind or soul. James implies that an overly slavish attention to both the discriminate character of language (nouns being exclusively distinguished) and the ensuing necessity of connecting grammatical particles might in fact be to blame for this bias toward discontinuity within both empiricism and rationalism.[31] Grammar aside, James observes that all relations as a matter of course involve degrees of both continuity and discontinuity, degrees which he casts, characteristically, in humanistic terms:

> Relations are of different degrees of intimacy. Merely to be "with" one another in a universe of discourse is the most external relation that terms can have, and seems to involve nothing whatever as to farther consequences. Simultaneity and time-interval come next, and then space-adjacency and distance. After them, similarity and difference, carrying the possibility of many inferences. Then relations of activity, tying terms into series involving change, tendency, resistance, and the causal order generally. Finally, the relation experienced between terms that form states of mind, and are immediately conscious of continuing each other.[32]

In its statement of the factuality – and thus the potential givenness or irreducibility – of certain determinate relations, radical empiricism seeks to be "fair to both the unity and the disconnexion. It finds no reason for treating either as illusory. It allots to each its definite sphere of description."[33] Thus in his factual statement of radical empiricism, James takes a cue from his methodological emphasis on inclusiveness, merging this notion with a realistic reading of the independence of certain aspects of the world of experience from the structure of our thoughts about them.

There are several things worthy of notice in the move James makes here. First, given the methodological principle of radical empiricism, if one were to ask what the status of relations would be, James's claim seems to follow quite naturally: relations must be experienced, or at least be characterized in terms drawn from experience, if they are to be able to be spoken of significantly in a radically empiricist philosophy.

[31] See James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 24. See also chapter 4 for discussion of this issue in the argument of *A Pluralistic Universe*.

[32] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 24. See chapter 4 for further discussion of this passage, particularly with regard to the intimacy/foreignness spectrum.

[33] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 24.

That said, it is noteworthy that the only explicit *inclusive* extension James makes through his methodological principle of experience is to relations, and conjunctive relations (both internal and external) as a class in particular.

As I suggested in bringing up the standard understanding of relations, James has in his sights the views of relations of both rationalists and empiricists. His disregard for rationalism is predictable. What is interesting, however, is his insight that empiricists, too, find themselves with a view that cannot be self-sufficient, chiefly because of their view of conjunctive relations. Although empiricists may have looked favorably on the independent reality of maximally disjunctive relations, to James they were ever skeptical of the status of conjunctive relations:

> Berkeley's nominalism, Hume's statement that whatever things we distinguish are as "loose and separate" as if they had no manner of connexion, James Mill's denial that similars have anything "really" in common, the resolution of the causal tie into habitual sequence, John Mill's account of both physical things and selves as composed of discontinuous possibilities, and the general pulverization of all experience by association and the mind-dust theory, are examples of what I mean.[34]

This predilection of previous empiricisms has numerous unlikely consequences. To James, the most problematic among them philosophically, however, is the implicit necessity within the empiricist system of a synthetic mental or spiritual force to bring the perceived world, or the perceived object, into some modicum of unity. That all the philosophers in question find it necessary to develop experientially transcendent means of unifying the discontinuous is actually grist for James's mill that our experiences and the "world" are of themselves, at least in part, just continuous with one another in fact. Otherwise why would philosophers find it necessary to create a dynamic to account for similar sorts of continuity? Why this agreement about our experiences of the world?

James's concern for the self-sufficiency of both the continuity and discontinuity of experience is frequently evident in his views on two different philosophical manifestations of the problem of synthesis or continuity: (a) the most cosmological of principles – the absolute, the all-knower, or God; and (b) the mundane problem of individual consciousness or thought. In addition to being philosophically suspect on the basis of his methodological principles, for James the idea of a

[34] Ibid., p. 23.

transcendental all-knower is morally unacceptable. On his view of conceptions of the absolute, the finite perspective is always utterly inadequate, both epistemically and causally. As a result, the individual's moral sense of his or her own situation is rendered merely subjective. One is, then, left ever anon with the justified possibility of taking "moral holidays," since the final outcome for humanity, good or bad, is vouchsafed on the one hand, and unknowable on the other.[35] By contrast, James fancies himself tough-minded enough "to take the universe to be really dangerous and adventurous." "I am willing," he writes, "that there should be real losses and real losers, and no total preservation of all that is . . . When the cup is poured off, the dregs are left behind forever, but the possibility of what is poured off is sweet enough to accept."[36]

James's temperamental bias against the moral consequences of the all-knower account of continuity is not his only ground for suspicion against it and related philosophical conceptions.[37] Already in *The Principles of Psychology* James was skeptical of the necessity of a synthetic apperceptive power to account for both the cohesiveness and individuality of consciousness or thought. James explains the unity of thought in *Principles* not by assuming a transcendental power, but rather by appealing to the "sensible continuity" within each personal consciousness itself, as well as the irreducible intentionality of thoughts and feelings themselves.[38] This early attempt to account for thinking can be seen as a prototypical application of both James's methodological and his factual theses of radical empiricism. His relative *success* (that is, his lack of encountering serious logical contradiction) in interpreting the unity of thought and consciousness through the metaphor of the stream or river no doubt bolsters him in asserting the *factuality* of relations of continuity and discontinuity. By 1904 he has raised the stakes for his claim of factuality, however, by moving the locus of this factuality from the merely mental sphere of the standard psychological view to

[35] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 41. [36] Ibid., p. 142.

[37] Temperament is a crucial element in understanding philosophy for James. See ibid., pp. 9–14; James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 14–16.

[38] See James, *Principles of Psychology*, pp. 231–3. It is important to note that in *Principles* James considers mental states as singular entities, successive upon one another. The sensible continuity found within each state is thus potentially different in kind or character from the relations of continuity between one state and another. The approach from the standpoint of pure experience, having given up the fundamental mental/physical dualism, is, in principle, supposed to elide this difference, and take the most problematic of the two sets of relations as its object.

the metaphysical plane of "pure experience" that logically precedes the mental/physical divide.[39]

The metaphysical thesis of pure experience

As I mentioned above, James's formal presentation of his new philosophical *Weltanschauung* began with the essay "Does Consciousness Exist?" in 1904. This highly rhetorical article overtly sought to demonstrate that the entity "consciousness" should no longer be counted among philosophical first principles. Although James had a longstanding interest in the status of consciousness, on account of his work in both psychology and ethics, the main target of his article on the existence of consciousness was not, in fact, consciousness itself. James was no doubt earnest in writing that consciousness is not reasonably understood as an entity but rather a function, namely, that of knowing. James's bigger quarry in this article, however, was the elemental dualistic structure that has animated Western philosophy for centuries, manifest in the ubiquitous thought/thing and mind/matter bifurcations.

James's thesis in "Does Consciousness Exist?" is that a great deal of the philosophical difficulties of his time (most notably epistemological problems that require the introduction of consciousness) derive from the traditional metaphysical presupposition of the dualism of thought and thing, or mind and matter. Given this fundamental dualism, the pervasive problem for every philosophical account is to provide some means of bridging the chasm, and this is usually in the form of an account of the cognitive relations between thoughts and things. Instead of offering yet another piece of epistemological engineering spanning the metaphysical chasm, James sets out to remove the presupposition of dualism itself, thereby "internalizing" into one monistic field the normally "external" problem of relating thoughts and things.[40] Thus he offers his thesis of pure experience:

> if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff "pure experience," then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort

[39] See the discussion in chapter 4 of the compounding of consciousness for more detail on these issues.

[40] James's approach to eradicating the problems of dualism could be said to be rather extreme. One might well suggest that there are other, less radical ways of rendering thought and thing continuous, avoiding some (if not all) of the problems of dualism. The radical view explicated here is, however, clearly the tack that James takes in his own work.

of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its "terms" becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge, the knower, the other becomes the object known.[41]

As a "primal stuff," James's pure experience is intended to be capable of serving as the basis for thought and thing, mind and matter, subject and object, as well as all of the relations that obtain between these. With no fundamental distinction in kind among these, James foresees no problem of reconnection for knowledge of the world.

James's article moves rather quickly from his proposal of a metaphysical monism to an exposition of its adequacy for a functional account of knowing without an entitative view of consciousness. Deceptively simple in statement, his conception of pure experience is much more involved than it might seem. The first point to make – and it is a crucial and too often overlooked one – is that while James rather conspicuously implies that pure experience is a unified substratum, calling it a "primal stuff," he does so in this article only for rhetorical reasons. Later in the very same text he takes back this implication, stating that pure experience is not, in fact, a single stuff at all: "I have now to say," he writes, "that there is no *general* stuff of which experience at large is made. There are as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced."[42] "Pure experience" is not a general substance or substratum, analogous (in having various definite properties) to matter or mind in other philosophies. On the contrary, it is in many respects simply a conceptual placeholder, denoting certain capacities and limitations (such as those seen in the methodological and factual theses), but unspecified with respect to many of the determinations philosophers generally delineate in such a basic metaphysical principle, whether the basic substance be mind (spirit) or matter.

James's invocation of pure experience as a monistic metaphysical substratum is, in many respects, characteristic of his broader approach to philosophy. The rhetorical strategy in both *Principles* and "Does Consciousness Exist?" abstains from directly attacking his opponents' arguments (though he is frequently game for such sport), instead offering an alternative conception that *avoids* precisely the problems into which he sees that his opponents' conceptions have run.[43] James's analyses of

[41] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 4–5. [42] Ibid., p. 14.

[43] Cornel West concurs with this. See West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), introduction and passim, and p. 67.

the difficulties of both psychology and epistemology indicate to him that the best place to look for a missed left turn is back at the level of basic metaphysical schematics and assumptions. Faced with the question of how epistemologically to bridge the metaphysical gap, James responds, "What makes you think that there is a gap?"

Granting James's first move, what can we understand about the sort of alternative James is offering? If his monism is not decidedly substantialist in the manner of idealism or materialism, what sort of monism is it? At the outset, one can say that the thesis of pure experience as articulated above is *formally* monistic: it posits a fundamental similarity among everything that can be philosophically categorized, as opposed to instantiating at least one fundamental dissimilarity, as do most previous metaphysical systems. James's conception nonetheless leaves open extreme variation in content or nature for the various "experiences" that are subsumed under it. As James puts it, "Experience is only a collective name for all these sensible natures, and save for time and space (and, if you like, for 'being') there appears no universal element of which all things are made."[44] It follows from this that the thesis of pure experience, while formally *monistic*, can also be called a *pluralistic* thesis in terms of content, allowing for a radical variation of content or natures among or within pure experience(s).

Calling the thesis of pure experience a formal one, or indicating that it is only a conceptual placeholder, leaves open the possibility that the idea of pure experience in fact excludes a great deal. As any reader of Kant well knows, one can work a great number of limitations into a "merely" formal principle. James's inclination with the thesis of pure experience is not, however, to provide an extensively restrictive set of limitations. On the contrary, in underscoring the elemental pluralism of natures or contents that coincide with the formal monism of pure experience, James intends only to raise to a metaphysical level the implications of his methodological thesis of radical empiricism – that all things in a philosophical account must be characterized in terms drawn from experience.

James's choice of the terms "pure" and "experience" are doubtless indicative of the close relation of his metaphysical notion to his methodology of radical empiricism. What does he mean by these terms? In his lecture notes for "Philosophy 9: Metaphysics," taught in the 1904–5 academic year (concurrent with the publication of the two articles in

[44] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 15.

question), James lists four benefits gained in taking "experience" as his "primal" metaphysical term. First, experience has the advantage of "neutrality." While it is inherently "double-barrelled," admitting both object and subject within it, it does not prejudge toward either matter or soul. Second, James lists the "concreteness" and "clearness" of experience, by which he seems to mean that it has a richness and specificity with which we are directly and sensibly familiar, as opposed to terms like "thought" or "matter," which on James's view are fundamentally abstract and unassociable directly with sensation. Third, James notes that experience is pragmatically convenient, by which he means that it coincides with pragmatism's appeal to the course of experience for the working out of truth. And fourth, returning to the "double-barrelled" insight, James lauds the inclusiveness of experience: "matter alone or mind alone exclude." The inherent dual ambiguity of experience thus precludes absolute idealism, and presumably reductive materialism as well, thereby providing a philosophy that is, at least potentially, adequate to the richness and complexity of life.[45]

In explaining the advantages of experience as a basic metaphysical notion, James capitalizes on a certain ambiguity – even an ambidextrousness – of the term "experience." On the one hand, experience can be treated conceptually, and ultimately, *metaphysically*. In this case it can be dealt with objectively, as a complex "thing" or an environment, composed of an irreducible complex of certain genera of contents and including within it various kinds of relations. This way of "taking" and treating experience underlies James's metaphysical and epistemological discussions, such as those in "Does Consciousness Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience," where James qua philosopher is out to elaborate a dynamic system, of which experience is the basic component. This does not exhaust the meaning of experience, however, for it can also be taken *phenomenologically*, indicating a subjective state brimming with particularity, intimacy, and concreteness, be it conceptual or sensory. This ambiguity relative to phenomenological and metaphysical meaning, this concurrent reference of experience to both the subjective and the objective, is crucial both for the success and the ultimate tone and texture of James's philosophical vision. Because he sees dualistic metaphysics to lead to exclusion, and since he seeks a plurally inclusive philosophy adequate to life, James thinks that he *must* use a term

[45] James, "Notes for Philosophy 9: Metaphysics (1904–5)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 331.

like "experience" which is fundamentally ambiguous as to dualistic prioritization.[46]

In his discussion of the advantages of "experience," James elaborates this fundamental ambiguity by also calling attention to the irreducible complexity of experience conceptually and phenomenologically. "Experience" as a collective term is one concept, but it is not in any sense a simple concept. Conceptually, experience is irreducible because it comprises several necessary elements that are non-hierarchically involved with one another, making it impossible simply to reduce experience to something more basic. Understanding experience to involve such inner duplicity (or, more accurately, multiplicity) means that if one takes experience as the basic metaphysical element, one will not necessarily be driven to inherently transcendent entities beyond it in developing more abstract accounts of the contents of experience. Experience, then, is taken by James to be conceptually adequate to the life that philosophy seeks to account for and influence. A philosophy of pure *experience* is thus *radical* empiricism writ metaphysically.

Experience is irreducibly complex in a second, phenomenological sense, because of its concreteness, or what amounts to the same thing for James, its sensibleness. On James's view, thought (or conceptual knowing) involves both abstracting from and adding to a more concrete state of experience, whether that concrete state is recognized to be perceptual or conceptual. This concrete state is less abstract, more complex, and frequently more sensory, unstripped by the psychological power of attention of its conceptually dissonant or conceptually

[46] In interpreting James's thesis of pure experience as *both* metaphysical and phenomenological (relative to epistemology) simultaneously, I am seeking to avoid the position taken by numerous scholars of James's radical empiricism who see him vacillating between understanding pure experience, on the one hand, as what Bertrand Russell called a neutral monism, and on the other hand, treating it merely as an as yet unanalyzed experience. Marcus Peter Ford's treatment is the most clear example of this, *William James's Philosophy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), pp. 76–7; John Wild also treats the problem this way in *The Radical Empiricism of William James* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 361, as does Graham Bird, *William James*, The Arguments of the Philosophers (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), p. 95. T. L. S. Sprigge is more complex, seeing James raising four views simultaneously, two of which are central, in *James and Bradley* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), pp. 120–37. Gerald Myers leans toward my interpretation, but unfortunately elides the issue in a rather unphilosophical moment – see Myers, *William James: this Life and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 308. The central problem with these interpretations is that both views I identify appear quite overtly in "Does Consciousness Exist?" This leaves the scholar in the undesirable hermeneutical position of merely asserting that James was confused, which, although quite possible, is not particularly illuminating. Cf. James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 6, 13.

uninteresting characteristics. This phenomenological state is also fluidly and immediately (although externally) related to other characteristics of the "world," other pure experiences. As I argued earlier in reference to the factual thesis of radical empiricism, these relations themselves must be understood to be concrete and specific, varying by matters of degree, relating and distancing the particular content of each pure experience from other contents of other pure experiences that make up the mosaic of the world.

This understanding of the concrete and frequently sensible character of experience draws attention to a streak in James's thought that often disturbs his modern-day readers – an apparent romanticism concerning the relation of thoughts to sensation. Some of his pithy remarks to the contrary, James does not ultimately mean simply to take up a romantic position against thought with his thesis of pure experience, thus preferring an un-"conscious," mystical state to the abstract one that follows upon reflection. Commenting in 1909 on his own essay "The Function of Cognition," where percepts are treated as the only realm of reality, James writes that he "now treat[s] concepts as a co-ordinate realm."[47] Clearly, if percepts and concepts are coordinate, there cannot be a philosophical preference for the perceptual or sensory order, whatever his rhetoric may suggest.

The issue is clouded in James's presentation by both his choice and description of the modifier "pure" for the basic metaphysical unity "experience." In characterizing pure experience he often has recourse to descriptions that bias the reader against the conceptual, in favor of an original and irretrievable state of purity and innocence:

> "Pure experience" is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense of a *that* which is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught. Pure experience in this state is simply but another name for feeling or sensation.[48]

From this quotation one could conclude that James was driven by a nostalgia for the mystical unity or purity of sensate experience described

[47] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 32.

[48] James, "The Thing and its Relations," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 46.

by romantics early in the century of James's birth.[49] Understanding James in this fashion, however, both misunderstands his writing and, more importantly, needlessly renders his *Weltanschauung* severely inconsistent. To get at what James means, we need to consider what he really intends by the "pure" in pure experience.

The modifier "pure" that James adds to his basic category of experience is best understood as distinguishing experience in two basic ways: one metaphysical and the other phenomenological. Not surprisingly, the existence of two usages of "pure" is analogous to the ambidextrousness of James's term "experience" discussed above. The metaphysical usage is somewhat complex; thus I shall begin there.

When used as a metaphysical placeholder, as in most of the essay "Does Consciousness Exist?," "pure" indicates that experience is to be taken as a collective term, as a general and basic term for use in philosophical constructions. As such pure experience partakes of certain fundamental characteristics of particular experiences, without ever being as specific or concrete as any actual experience. In this context James is apt to treat pure experience as an unquantified, indeterminate noun – much as we speak *collectively* of land. He writes abstractly, then, of pure experience in general, or of a philosophy and a world of pure experience.[50]

James also writes metaphysically of pure experience in a second way, speaking *discretely* of bits of pure experience.[51] In this usage James quantifies the collective noun in a nonetheless indeterminate sense, much as we speak of parcels of land, or cups of coffee. Land is not self-quantifying by virtue of its being land (the way tables are self-quantifying), and neither is pure experience viewed from the level of the system. Thus a discrete bit of pure experience can in principle be more or less involved, broader or narrower in scope, larger or smaller, depending on its particular circumstances or content. *Qua* pure experience, a *bit* or *piece* of pure experience is still rather indeterminate, though it is by definition discrete in contrast to pure experience taken collectively.[52]

[49] In *Novices of Sais*, for example, Novalis writes of restoring "the old, simple, natural state," speaking of the basic purity and truth of sensation in contrast to conception. Later, Novalis writes that "as he moves into the infinite, he becomes more and more at one with himself." See Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, Ralph Manheim (tr.) (New York: C. Valentin, 1949), p. 49.

[50] "The relation itself is a part of pure experience," James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 4; see also his employment of the term "a philosophy of pure experience" and the title phrase in "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 21, 42.

[51] James refers discretely to pure experience by both "pieces" and "bits." See, e.g., "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 14, 7.

[52] There are intermediates between these extremes, e.g., the collectives of pure experience that make up personalities or cultures. As do many things in James's system, determinacy admits of degree in this distinction.

Pure experience in both the collective and discrete (the indeterminately quantified) uses is a metaphysical term for James. In its collective sense it indicates and provides a term for the basic metaphysical level to which one can descend without abandoning radical empiricism's methodological restriction to experience. In its discrete sense, pure experience is a functional denominator, denoting a distinct component that interacts within James's dynamic metaphysical system in such a way as to account for particular functions. The function that he is most concerned to clarify, ultimately, is the function of knowing; it is for this that pure experience is most frequently deployed.

James began the article "Does Consciousness Exist?" with the express goal of providing an account of the cognitive function without recourse to a substantive notion of consciousness. This project is conceptual, a metaphysical examination of the world as a whole or system that seeks to describe its dynamics.[53] James's particular account of knowing in this article is achieved primarily by clarifying knowing through the idea of pure experience. On this view knowing is a relation that holds within pure experience taken collectively, and between bits of pure experience taken discretely.[54]

Although this functional, metaphysical view of knowing is James's principal philosophical aim, he is also led by his philosophical conscience to speak of pure experience in a second, *phenomenological* sense, describing it as at all times "the instant field of the present."[55] In so doing, he plays on and demonstrates what he takes to be the fundamental characteristic of an empirical philosophy, or a radical philosophy of experience: the irreducible ambiguity of experience as to the subjective and objective. As I emphasized earlier, James seeks to develop a philosophy that can more adequately accommodate the richness of life; as a result, he takes his basic unit, pure experience, to be the meeting point of the objective and the subjective, the metaphysical (or conceptual) and the phenomenal (or sensual).[56] Pure experience objectively taken is a discrete bit functioning in a system (or collectivity) of pure experiences that make up an ever growing and changing world. Subjectively, or phenomenologically, the closest thing to a "pure" experience for James is, however, the ever moving now, "the *that* which

[53] See chapter 2 for a more in-depth consideration of what James understands by "metaphysical."
[54] See the three subsections just below for more detail on James's account of knowing.
[55] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 13.
[56] Note that not all conceptual ideas are necessarily metaphysical for James, although all metaphysical ideas are conceptual.

is not yet any definite *what*, tho ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness."[57]

By speaking phenomenologically of a pure experience, James does *not* mean to indicate the narrow, solipsistic view that only that which is in the instant field of the present has reality. Rather, he means to underscore his idea that the generic metaphysical characteristics of pure experience informing his philosophical *Weltanschauung* must be found in the concreteness of *real* experience, experience had by, among others, philosophers living and thinking in the world. Not only, then, does he not restrict reality to the instant now of the present; in addition, James opens out reality to include our thoughts and ideas. Although these do involve abstraction from the stream of experience, reflection (or conceptual thinking) for James is fundamentally an additive process, a process that contributes to reality, building it out by the edges.[58] Interestingly, the products of reflection, or for that matter philosophy, for James are not fundamentally separate from the realm out of which they are abstracted and to which they add. Nor are they in fact any more or less real. Rather, products of reflection, conceptual or perceptual, are potential pure experiences in the phenomenological, subjective sense. They are thus also part of pure experience taken collectively, part of what there is, all of which is made of pure experience understood metaphysically. Through the function of knowing, then, humans both cognitively relate and contribute to the world of pure experience taken both metaphysically and phenomenologically. It is to this process of knowing that I now turn.

The functional account of direct acquaintance

In discussing the metaphysical and epistemological issues that have preceded this (the methodological and factual claims of radical empiricism and the thesis of pure experience), I (and James, for that matter) have in many respects been taking for granted the question of knowledge and knowing. Taking a systematic perspective on a world-view requires one, in a sense, to beg one question after another, hoping in turn to

[57] James, "The Thing and its Relations," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 46. See also "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 13; "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 36.

[58] Comments to this effect populate all of James's later philosophical writings. See, for example, James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 41, written in 1904; "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 42; and "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 7.

subject all the contentious issues to adequate scrutiny from the perspective of the other principles in the philosophical system. James's *Weltanschauung* proves no exception to this general characterization, reserving its own greatest preoccupation for the issue of knowing and knowledge.

James's concern for knowing is evident throughout his writings, playing a central role in *The Principles of Psychology* and appearing in one form or another in virtually every discussion after that. In the 1904 articles that I am taking as the baseline for this preliminary explication of his radical empiricism, he spends the greatest portion of his prose explicitly discussing knowing. In the essay "Does Consciousness Exist?" the implications of the thesis of pure experience for our understanding of knowing are somewhat difficult to follow. From the vantage of the succeeding article, however, one can easily see how James exploits the methodological, the factual, and the metaphysical claims of radical empiricism in his account of knowing.

In "A World of Pure Experience," James offers a threefold categorization of what he calls the cognitive relation – the relation of the knower and the known. According to James the knower and the known are either:

> 1) The self-same piece of experience taken twice over in different contexts; or they are
> 2) two pieces of *actual* experience belonging to the same subject, with definite tracts of conjunctive transitional experience between them; or
> 3) the known is a *possible* experience either of that subject or another, to which the said conjunctive relations *would* lead, if sufficiently prolonged.[59]

Interpreting this list immediately afterwards, James claims that class 3 may always be hypothetically reduced to class 2, with the differences between classes 1 and 2 being simply the difference between the mind enjoying "'direct' acquaintance" with an object and the mind having "knowledge about" it.[60]

This distinction between "knowledge about" and "'direct' acquaintance" is a favorite of James, recurring throughout his published record. It appears for the first time, with attribution to John Grote, in "On the Function of Cognition," written in 1884.[61] In that essay James had

[59] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 27. [60] Ibid., p. 28.

[61] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, pp. 17–19. The article was originally published in *Mind* in January 1885, but most readers are familiar with it for its appearance as the lead chapter in *The Meaning of Truth* in 1909. James presented it there in part for historical interest, to indicate his pragmatic and radically empiricist leanings and ideas at that early date.

sought to distinguish the mental elements of thought and feeling from one another, with the former producing knowledge about an object while the latter delivers content in the form of direct acquaintance with the object. By 1904 he has rejected the metaphysical dualism of mind and matter, subject and object, that underlies his 1884 rendering. The basic form of the distinction, with its implicit contrast between mediation and immediacy, is, however, one that he never abandoned.

To appreciate fully what James means by distinguishing knowing into two kinds, direct acquaintance and knowledge about, we need first to take into account the significance of the rest of his characterization of knowing, particularly his seemingly innocuous claim that knowing in either case is a cognitive relation. At first glance one might stumble on the term "cognitive" as the important modifier. For James, however, "cognitive" is just a synonym for knowing itself. The crucial notion for his view, instead, is that knowing is a *relation*, a relation of the sort that is subsumed under the factual thesis of radical empiricism, namely, that "*the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system.*"[62]

In discussing James's understanding of relations above, I highlighted his inclusion of conjunctive relations as equal in status to disjunctive relations. This inclusion ultimately finds its real philosophical value in his account of knowing. As I pointed out above, James understands relations to be matters of degree of intimacy or foreignness, inherently involving some degree of connection or transition, as he often calls it. While this notion itself is novel, James's view is also innovative through its recognition of these relations as given, or at least as given as anything in his system.

In taking relations as givens – or, more aptly, as ground-level elements – within his system, James commits himself to the notion that relations are in fact themselves *experiences*, members of the collective of pure experience, and even discrete bits of pure experience. In discussing the cognitive relation, for example, he writes of "certain *extrinsic* phenomena, special experiences of conjunction."[63] Likewise, in 1905 he rails against the rationalist who takes conjunctive relations "not as they are given in their first intention, as parts constitutive of experience's living flow, but only as they appear in retrospect, each fixed as a

[62] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22. [63] Ibid., p. 28.

determinate object of conception, static, therefore, and contained within itself."[64]

One might object that there is a significant modulation between saying that the relations must be experiential – that is, contained within experience – and saying that they themselves are "special experiences." James is not, however, involved in obfuscation here, or even in loose trading on verbal similarities. On the contrary, he is following both his methodological restriction to experience and his thesis of pure experience to their logical ends. As noted above, experience for James is a term of great variation and ambiguity, capable in principle of both complexity and simplicity. Although there is a range of experiential elements, no particular constellation of these, at least not at the outset, is necessary for something to qualify as pure experience. The only requirement is that a pure experience be admitted to *be* experiential. Thus for James one discrete bit of pure experience might be extremely complex, including numerous relations, sensible determinations, and conceptual categories, while another experience might be sparse, involving only one sensible or conceptual component, or one relation such as transition or "jar." For James, then, the relation of transition central to the cognitive relation is itself a potential pure experience on a (very) sparse taking, while only one part of a particular pure experience on a rich or complex taking.

If we grant to James that the cognitive relation is a particular relation of conjunctive transition found within pure experience collectively, and even found as a pure experience taken discretely, what might we understand him to indicate by the notion of direct acquaintance? What is conjoined metaphysically, and how is it experienced phenomenologically, to come back to the two aspects of James's project described above?

In bringing up his first appeal to Grote's distinction, I characterized the aspect that James appreciated as the distinction between immediacy and mediacy. Direct acquaintance for James must therefore indicate an immediate conjunctive relation, in contrast to the mediacy of knowledge about. This immediacy may be interpreted in two different ways in his project: again, metaphysically, and phenomenologically.

As I discussed above, for any determinate pure experience, any particular bit of pure experience taken metaphysically, there is on James's

[64] James, "Is Radical Empiricism Solipsistic?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 120.

view a state in which the experience is *not* separated into subject and object, thought and thing:

Experience, I believe, has no such inner duplicity; and the separation of it into consciousness and content comes, not by way of subtraction, but by way of addition – the addition, to a given concrete piece of it, of other sets of experiences, in connection with which severally its use or function may be of two different kinds.[65]

This is what James means by calling his basic metaphysical element "pure" experience. It is pure in the loosest of Kant's uses of the term (*reine*) – "not mixed with anything extraneous" – not, on James's view, functionally associated with any other determinate or discrete bits of experience, and therefore not differentiated according to, for example, subjective and objective function.[66]

In order for James to succeed in articulating a complete, radically empiricist world-view, however, this pure state must also in some sense be an epistemological state. If James could not connect this state directly with his account of knowing, he would be unable to articulate a philosophical system within the confines of experience. That is, he would be reintroducing a fundamental gap between the basic metaphysical notion of his system (the putative building block of the world) and any knowledge or thoughts we might have about it. Since James definitely seeks to avoid this, it follows that pure experience must be both a state of being and a state of knowing in at least some minimal sense. Where "pure" is the appropriate modifier when treating the metaphysical question, immediacy is the analogous state when treating the epistemological issue. Direct acquaintance for James, therefore, indicates the discrete pure experience treated epistemologically.

The line between epistemology and metaphysics is, as usual in philosophy, a rather difficult one to draw. James's preference for a functional explanation of knowing makes what he intends even less obvious. In 1905 he authored a condensed version in French of the series of articles introducing radical empiricism, titled "La Notion de Conscience." There, he clarifies his understanding of the functional account with reference to the subject/object distinction and ontology:

Les attributions sujet et objet, représenté et représentatif, chose et pensée, signifient donc une distinction practique qui est de la dernière importance,

[65] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 6–7.

[66] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A11. Kant's more strict (and more frequent) meaning involves the absence of anything empirical, which is anathema to James's empirical approach.

mais qui est d'ordre FONCTIONNEL seulement, et nullement ontologique comme le dualisme classique se la représente.[67]

In denying any ontological distinction between thought and thing, or subject and object, James underscores his commitment to a formally monistic ontology – to a metaphysics of pure experience. Additionally, he highlights his rejection of a fundamentally (or exclusively) representational epistemology. On James's view, the practical function of the subject/object distinction within experience does not necessarily increase the number of fundamental metaphysical or ontological components or substances. Instead, it gives a means of differentiating the same pure experience according to its various functions or uses, one of which might be knowing in a particular case.

When I discussed James's twofold conception of knowing, I distinguished direct acquaintance and knowledge about according to their different modes of relating cognitively. Direct acquaintance on James's view admits of an immediate cognitive relation, while knowledge about admits of a mediate relation. In characterizing pure experience earlier, however, I noted that the purity of the experience involved the lack of (actuated) *functional* relations to other discrete pure experiences. This appears to be at odds with the notion of direct acquaintance as providing some kind of conjunctive relation, and therefore being knowing in any meaningful sense, given James's goal of a functional account of knowing. His idea here, however, is quite astute. In the cognitive relation of direct acquaintance, it is not two discrete pure experiences that are conjoined, but rather two collectives of pure experience – two contexts, as James is apt to call them. The collectives are conjoined through the sharing of one discrete member, one pure experience, and as a result are not connected by an additional external relation. The most helpful example James offers of this is the case where the particular experience of sitting in a room, which James calls a "room-experience," simultaneously enters into two different contexts, namely, that of the individual's personal biography and the history of the house of which the room is a part.[68] Insofar as this particular pure experience is taken in its first intention – as a pure experiencing – the two contexts are through that pure experience joined immediately. It is in this case

[67] James, "La Notion de Conscience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 117. "The attributes subject and object, represented and representer, thing and thought, signify therefore a practical distinction of the highest importance, but which is of a functional order only, and not at all ontological as classical dualism represents it" (my translation).

[68] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 8.

that "the mind," as James says, "enjoys direct 'acquaintance' with a present object," and that the individual and the room are immediately conjoined.[69]

In describing the situation of direct acquaintance metaphysically in this way, James sets himself up for the classic question of how one thing can, while remaining one, be involved in two different relations at the same time. James's answer is drawn from both phenomenological experience and common sense, and is quite simple:

> The puzzle of how the one identical room can be in two places is at bottom just the puzzle of how one identical point can be on two lines. It can, if it be situated at their intersection; and similarly, if the "pure experience" of the room were a place of intersection of two processes, which connected it with different groups of associates respectively, it could be counted twice over, as belonging to either group, and spoken of loosely as existing in two places, although it would remain all the time a numerically simple thing.[70]

From the wider, metaphysical perspective, then, knowing through direct acquaintance involves immediately relating two different groups of associates – collectives of pure experience – through one singular, discrete experience. Looked at from the broad point of view, the same pure experience functions as object in one set of associates and subject in another, yet both metaphysically and epistemologically, there is a state in which it is singular – metaphysically immediate.

Because James's world-view embraces at its most basic level the fundamental ambiguity of experience, the immediacy of direct acquaintance also admits of phenomenological description. Where immediacy taken metaphysically involves a sort of conjunctive relation, a positive connecting function of the pure experience seen from the wider perspective, the immediacy of direct acquaintance phenomenologically can only be described negatively, as a lack of mediation by concepts.[71] Pure experience functioning this way is simply the stream of experience, or "the flux," in its dynamic flowing:

[69] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 28.

[70] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 8.

[71] This sounds as if James is (or at least I am) depending on the notion of a purely non-conceptual experience. That is, however, inaccurate, since concepts can also be part of the experiential flux. Rather, James is denoting what we might call a lack of the mediating modality of conceptual knowing, or rather, the lack of the absolute discontinuity characteristic of conceptual knowing that requires external relations of conjunction. Describing such a state conceptually is problematic. Such a state can, insofar as it is real, be elicited or evoked in the reader, much as, e.g., F. D. E. Schleiermacher and Rudolph Otto sought to evoke religion or the *mysterium tremendum* (respectively) in their work. James's project dips into this sort of discussion at times, often without demarcating the shift for the reader.

> Far back as we go, the flux, both as a whole and in its parts, is that of things conjunct and separated. The great continua of time, space and the self envelope everything, betwixt them, and flow together without interfering. The things that they envelope come as separate in some ways and as continuous in others. Some sensations coalesce with some ideas, and others are irreconcilable. Qualities compenetrate one space, or exclude each other from it. They cling together persistently in groups that move as units, or else they separate. Their changes are abrupt or discontinuous; and their kinds resemble or differ; and, as they do so, they fall into either even or irregular series.[72]

Phenomenologically, the immediacy of direct acquaintance is, then, the direct "givenness" of the differentiations of the contents of an experience (be they sensations or ideas). This state is independent to a significant degree of the current abstracting effects of the powers of attention and conceptualization, and is full and rich in particularity. It is, as James writes, the "stream of concretes," taken in its first intention.[73]

Presenting direct acquaintance in this manner raises several serious issues. Among the most important and obvious are: (1) the status of concepts or conception relative to both pure experience and direct acquaintance; and (2) the relation of immediacy to certainty for James. The first question arises from James's tendency to treat pure experience and direct acquaintance as interchangeable with perception or sensation. Contributing to this problem is his understanding of concepts as "cut out" from the stream of experience, and his notion of conception as fundamentally involving abstraction. These treatments together suggest that there is, for James, a fully unconceptualized and accessible given, thus making concepts, the conceptual realm, and for that matter philosophy, inherently of secondary importance and reliability. On this view, James becomes, unfortunately, a naive realist of the most unsophisticated sort.

As I discussed above, James does not intend ultimately to privilege percepts over concepts. What he does mean to do, however, is to highlight the difference between an experience (perceptual or conceptual) in its first intention – in the modality of direct acquaintance – and a second intentional, second-order reference to that experience – through the modality of knowledge about. This involves including concepts, or conceptual experiences, under the rubrics of *both* pure experience and direct acquaintance.

On the "double-barrelled" understandings of experience that have dominated since Kant's first *Critique*, "real" or "true" experience has

[72] James, "The Thing and its Relations," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 46. [73] Ibid., p. 47.

generally been understood to involve both a percept and a concept, a sensible content from "without" and a conceptual one from "within." "Thoughts without content are empty," Kant writes, tying "experience" to valid knowledge as a product.[74] In contrast to Kant, James's notion of experience is both ontologically fundamental and potentially indeterminate with regard to truth. Although formally monistic, James's pure experience is ambiguous as to its content. And that ambiguity extends to the percept/concept distinction. Because James's view seems both clearest and relatively unproblematic at the level of percepts or sensations, he tends to employ perceptual examples in explaining direct acquaintance and pure experience as a modality of knowing. His basic conception, however, is not so restrictive: on the one hand, he is dubious about the radical aconceptuality of percepts or sensations with which we can be directly acquainted; on the other he is aware of the aperceptual possibility for certain conceptions taken in their first intention.

Although in *Pragmatism* James calls the sensational and relational parts of reality "dumb," thereby implying that direct acquaintance with them would provide certain (if not altogether adequate) transmission of content, he recognizes immediately thereafter that any sensation or percept as such is modified conceptually, because of the selective nature of sensation or perception itself. He writes:

> even in the field of sensation our minds exert a certain arbitrary choice. By our inclusions and omissions we trace the field's extent; by our emphasis we mark its foreground and its background; by our order we read it in this direction or in that. We receive in short the block of marble, but we carve the statue ourselves.[75]

Percepts or sensations, then, are only relatively, rather than radically, aconceptual. By extension, knowing through the modality of direct acquaintance is only more concrete by degree than is knowing through the modality of knowledge about. The difference is significant, but it is not absolute.

The converse, however, turns out to be true of conceptions: that is, while James sees all perceptions and sensations as conceptually influenced in their first intention, he finds that conceptual pure experiences must be able to be literally aperceptual in their first intention, if both

[74] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. B75.

[75] See James, *Pragmatism*, p. 119, for the "arbitrary choice" in the field of sensation; see James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 9–10; and "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 37, for concepts taken in their first intention.

the coordinate status of percepts and concepts and the experiential reality of relations is to be maintained.[76] The principal example James gives of this is the ability of concepts to function as pure experiences insofar as they can function as both thought and thing:

Abstracting, then, from percepts altogether, what I maintain is, that any single non-perceptual experience tends to get counted twice over, just as a perceptual experience does, figuring in one context as an object or field of objects, in another as a state of mind: and all this without the least internal self-diremption on its own part into consciousness and content.[77]

In holding such a view James is thus emphasizing both the human capacity of imagination and the potentially novel power of (abstract) thought. Literally aperceptual concepts such as Julius Caesar, or even theoretically aperceptual objects such as a round square or a quark, can nonetheless function objectively in the world of pure experience on James's view, just as do perceptual experiences, even though they may never relate to or involve an actual percept or concrete sensory content.[78] As pure experiences, then, in principle these purely conceptual "objects" can also be said to be known through the modality of direct acquaintance, to be known in their first intention. What the content is that is known, in these cases, is not, however, exactly the same as in the case of knowing a perceptual object in its first intention.

In claiming that concepts may function in the first intention as pure experiences, James is doing two by-now-familiar things. First, he is following his methodological principle scrupulously, understanding concepts as something drawn out of experience rather than experience as something composed of, at least in part, concepts (taking them as ontologically different from sensations or their putative objects). In other words, "experience" is James's basic conception, and both concepts and percepts, as well as relations, must be understood to be functions of experience, rather than experience a function of concepts

[76] Relations of continuity and discontinuity are not strictly reducible to percepts, although their reality is also given as part and parcel of pure experience taken both collectively and discretely. This is due to the fact that concepts as well as percepts come in their first intention with relations which are given as a matter of fact. Thus the fate of relations is analogous to that of concepts in this question: if either of them relies on a perceptual given for its being a pure experience, or being experienced in the modality of direct acquaintance, then James's project of a non-dualistic metaphysics will fail.

[77] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 10.

[78] Julius Caesar and a round square both do involve sensory content through the imaginative stimulation of the neural network. The content is not, however, perceptual in the literal sense.

and percepts.[79] Second, James is paying close attention to both the phenomenology of human experience and the power of organizing concepts that apparently have no sensible counterpart or referent. He is well aware that we can spend hours contemplating unicorns that never were, or relishing novels about people and places that never have been (sensible).[80] James's attention to the practical power of organizing concepts, like "experience" or "the good," his attention to thinking as a means of ameliorating or denigrating the world via ideas, is a major feature of his thought as a whole, and as such is really not surprising here.[81] For James, then, concepts must join percepts and relations as particular subclasses of experience taken collectively, subclasses that interact in his functional account of knowing.

The second issue that James's phenomenological characterization of direct acquaintance raises is the relation of immediacy to certainty. I have argued that he intends to highlight a sort of immediacy in articulating direct acquaintance as a species of knowing. The immediacy he has in mind is quite literal, an immediacy wherein the subject and object, or the thought and the thing, are not yet separate, not yet individuated (differentiated) and mediated one to the other. The experience is, in a sense, self-contained in its particularity, whatever that might happen to be.

Upon departing this phenomenological state we often have an intentional feeling of its reality, truth, or certainty. James is quite clear, however, that these particular discriminations in fact depend on external (experiential) relations among determinate pure experiences – on the context of these experiences – not on relations that are part of the content of the particular experiences in their pure form.[82] Commenting on this feeling, James writes:

For the time being, it [the pure experience] is plain, unqualified actuality or existence, a simple *that*. In this *naïf* immediacy it is of course *valid*; it is *there*, we *act* upon it; and the doubling of it in retrospection into a state of mind and a

[79] Related to this is James's interpretation of the verification of knowledge about as involving both the special experience of conjunction (leading) and the termination in a moment of direct acquaintance with the object meant. See the following sections for more detail.

[80] Which is not to claim that we do not respond to these via our neurological, and therefore sensory, network. See James's discussions of the evocation of sensation by thought in *Principles of Psychology*, pp. 690, 708.

[81] See, e.g., *Meaning of Truth*, p. 130, where James speaks of hypersensible realities such as "electrons, mind-stuff, God" as an outgrowth of our cognitive experience.

[82] Recall that pure experiences are not simple in the sense of excluding any relations at all. See above for discussion of James's understanding of internal, immutable relations, or relations which pertain to the content of a bit of pure experience as such.

> reality intended thereby, is just one of the acts. The "state of mind," first treated explicitly as such in retrospection, will stand corrected or confirmed, and the retrospective experience in its turn will get a similar treatment; but the immediate experience in its passing is always "truth," ([author's note:] "Note the ambiguity of this term, which is taken sometimes objectively and sometimes subjectively") practical truth, *something to act on*, at its own movement.[83]

"Real" and "true" are practical judgments we make about pure experiences and the conceptions (and propositions) we connect with them respectively, judgments based on the functionality of the relations we construct among or attribute to the experiences. James's conception of the world of pure experience taken as a whole includes illusions, imaginary objects, dreams, falsehoods, ambiguous experiences, future and past experiences and persons – virtually anything that does not pretend to transcend experience. Our knowing of these experiences through direct acquaintance is a familiarity with their contents, a familiarity distinguished by a degree of intimacy and concreteness relative to the differentially foreign and abstract character of knowledge about these pure experiences as conceptual objects.[84]

Given all these difficulties, one might well ask why James goes to all of the trouble to define direct acquaintance as an immediate form of knowing. To put this another way, what work does it do for him philosophically? One answer, central to James's empirical temper, is that it provides an internal mechanism to recognize and account for novelty. The question of novelty for James boils down to the issue of whether the "real" world – the world actually experienced – is reducible in detail to the conceptual world, where the latter is understood along the lines of the "block universe" that various rationalisms claim to predict or construct. Novelty in this sense really indicates the fact that some experiences have determinate, concrete contents more detailed or explicit than that which can be expected or predicted – a particular experience may be sweet or sour (literally or figuratively), or it may be more violent or peaceful, in addition to or in spite of our (rational)

[83] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 13.

[84] The intimacy/foreignness criterion is an important one for James that has received scant notice. It is a central component of his articulation of his radically empiricist world-view, particularly its later articulation as pluralistic panpsychism in *A Pluralistic Universe*. See James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 23–4, and *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 15–23. Compare this also to the hot/cold distinction in *Varieties*, p. 162. For more discussion on intimacy, see chapter 4, as well as David Lamberth, "Interpreting the Universe After a Social Analogy: Intimacy, Panpsychism, and a Finite God in A Pluralistic Universe," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, Ruth Anna Putnam (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

expectations. Referring to these determinate contents in a concrete pure experience, of course, involves setting up external relations (which are nonetheless experienceable) between a pure experience and other experiences, thereby effacing the purity of the moment and putting us onto the turf of reflection and knowledge about. James's aim in deploying pure experience epistemologically, however, is to articulate a sort of limit conception both theoretically and experientially, a limit at which the knower and the known actually do come together, a limit at which two knowers can and do meet in a concrete, shared world.[85] Theoretically this conception is a limit in that it is the required base notion for conceptual knowing to be meaningful. Experientially, pure experience or direct acquaintance is a limit conception in that we all have a vague and yet quite real sense of the difference between having tasted a papaya and having had that unique taste merely described to us, or having read a novel and having had it related to us. Direct acquaintance, knowing in its first intention, is not readily available to the philosopher in the way that concepts are (taken not as pure experiences, but as referring to them), but it is identifiable, James thinks, partly because of the unpredicted trail of novel determinacy it leaves behind.

The functional account of knowledge about

Insofar as we understand knowing to involve discriminating the true from the false, the real from the unreal, James's conception of "direct" acquaintance does not really appear to provide us with knowledge at all. But much as the Greek verb γιγνώσκω ("to know," from which also the root γνο-, cognate to "knowledge") implies an ambiguity between the hidden intimacy and the public character of knowing, so James's full understanding of the function of knowing takes on a twofold character, with direct acquaintance balanced by an understanding of what he calls "knowledge about."[86]

When I introduced James's categorization of the cognitive relation above, I characterized the principal difference between direct acquaintance and knowledge about as the distinction between immediacy and

[85] See James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 40–2 for the practical limitations on sharing an actual percept between two different knowers.

[86] In discussing John Grote, James notes the division of verbal labor involved in this in German and French, with their *kennen/wissen* and *savoir/connaître* distinctions respectively. English, like Greek, does not have such a verbal division of labor, thus involving a particular ambiguity. See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 184.

mediacy. Direct acquaintance involves, on the one hand, immediacy with the contents of the pure experience, and on the other hand, an immediate connection between two different contexts of associates, frequently that of thoughts and things. Knowledge about is also a cognitive relation for James, a peculiar experience of conjunctive transition, but it is a mediate relation in contrast to the immediacy of direct acquaintance. In addition, where direct acquaintance always involves what one might call an internal relation, immediate and intimate, within the bounds of an admittedly (and variably) complex discrete pure experience, knowledge about for James requires external relations of conjunction: "Certain *extrinsic* phenomena, special experiences of conjunction, are what impart to the image, be it what it may, its knowing office."[87]

From the wider, metaphysical perspective, the cognitive relation constituting knowledge about is simply the state in which certain continuous intermediaries (themselves pure experiences) functionally connect two discrete pure experiences. As we saw in James's understanding of direct acquaintance, one discrete bit of pure experience can itself be (or function) in two different contexts, thereby serving immediately as both subject and object, mind and matter, knower and the known. This is a metaphysical case wherein epistemologically, "the mind enjoys direct 'acquaintance' with a present object."[88] In other types of knowing, however, "the mind has 'knowledge about' an object not immediately there." That is, there are at a minimum two discrete pure experiences, each functioning in multiple contexts. The crucial detail that makes these two experiences actually know one another for James is that they be externally connected, or mediated, by a series of continuous, conjunctive intermediaries (themselves experiential) through the contexts that separate them. Insofar as these connections *function* as continuous, the one pure experience may be said, James thinks, to know the other.

In addition to this metaphysical description of knowledge about, James also provides a phenomenological account from the vantage of the subject. Where in the case of direct acquaintance he chose most frequently to employ perceptual examples, even though at this point he considers concepts and percepts to be of the same order, here of necessity he leans on conceptual examples, and in particular the knowing of percepts by concepts.[89] Phenomenologically, the cognitive relation of

[87] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 28. [88] Ibid., p. 28.

[89] James might have offered a concept–concept example as well, since the knower and the known can both be drawn from the conceptual order.

knowledge about involves a series of discrete experiences, all of which have the character (or evoke the feeling or experience) of *leading* one to another serially, until they terminate in a final discrete experience. This feeling of transition, or of leading, is the phenomenological analogue for James to the metaphysical state of being conjunctively related, discussed above. Discussing this, he writes of his sitting in his office, thinking of Memorial Hall at Harvard:

> if I can lead you to the hall, and tell you of its history and present uses; if in its presence I feel my idea, however imperfect it may have been, to have led hither and be now *terminated*; if the associates of the image and of the felt hall run parallel, so that each term of the one context corresponds serially . . . That percept was what I *meant*, for into it my idea has passed by conjunctive experiences of sameness and fulfilled intention. Nowhere is there jar, but every later moment continues and corroborates an earlier one.[90]

The case of knowledge about an object, on James's view, is thus both described and experienced within the tissue of experience, thereby remaining true to the methodological restriction of radical empiricism. "In this continuing and corroborating," James writes, "taken in no transcendental sense, but denoting definitely felt transitions, *lies all that the knowing of a percept by an idea can possibly contain or signify*. Wherever such transitions are felt, the first experience *knows* the last one."[91] That is what knowing, in James's favorite reference to Shadworth Hodgson, may be "*known-as*."[92]

James's conception of knowledge about turns, both metaphysically and phenomenologically, on mediation – on both the existence and dynamic tracing of external relations among various pure experiences, or instances of direct acquaintance. As I have already discussed, the immediacy of direct acquaintance provides James with a mechanism for understanding how determinate content, and most importantly novel content, "gets into" consciousness or knowing. Extending that, I might add that the mediation of knowledge about provides him with a way for admitting this novelty or particularity into thought proper (or thought involving the power of abstraction).[93] The most interesting

[90] James, "A World of Pure Experience," Essays in Radical Empiricism, pp. 28–9.

[91] Ibid., p. 29.

[92] See ibid., p. 36. Hodgson's quotation is from his 1885 pamphlet *Philosophy and Experience*. See the notes to James, *Pragmatism*, p. 160.

[93] Contrasting consciousness to thought is a very Hegelian thing to do. An analogous contrast appears in James's *Principles* in the contrast between "sciousness" and "consciousness." The same relative distinction, between relative immediacy and relative mediacy, is at work in the direct acquaintance/knowledge about split here. See James, *Principles of Psychology*, pp. 290–1.

point to note about the relation between these two subclasses of James's functional understanding of knowing, however, is that direct acquaintance and knowledge about are integrally related to one another. Knowledge about requires direct acquaintance both as its terminus and for the feeling of leading to make sense phenomenologically. Direct acquaintance does not require knowledge about strictly, for we might well be sentient without having the capacity for abstraction or mediation between states of immediacy. But insofar as we admit some sort of conceptual enterprise (which doing philosophy certainly admits), an explanation of mediate knowledge is required to account for the content of direct acquaintance being integrated into the larger systems of associates that make up the world. Mediacy and immediacy walk hand in hand. Thus James's two subclasses of cognitive relations alternate, providing both a wider, more general perspective and an intimate, potentially novel concrete familiarity.

This overall picture seems quite adequate for cases similar to what James describes, where one begins with an image or thought of an object, and then follows that out through the stream of experience until a perceptual terminus – direct acquaintance with the object itself – is reached. But does this account for most of what fills our thoughts and comprises our knowledge? In constructing his example of Memorial Hall, James has exploited one of the easier and no doubt less frequent instances of the external cognitive relation, or knowledge about. His account is not, however, intended to cover only this narrow scope. On the contrary, since perceptual, conceptual, and relational experiences all count for James as discrete pure experiences, in theory any number of recombinations are possible in construing knowing in its mediated form. The most powerful variations that he has in view have to do with the possibility of substitution, or representation, and the concomitant conception of "virtual knowing."

In opting for a functional account of knowledge about, James has avoided characterizing knowing as a transcendently caused interaction between ontologically dissimilar elements, thereby privileging one of the sorts of elements and obscuring our insight into the knowledge relation. Instead, he has opted to describe knowing as a dynamic among ontologically similar components. Consistently with his desire to avoid traditional causal logic, and in line with the drift of functional explanation in the nineteenth century, James individuates these dynamics not according to their starting points but according to their

termini.[94] Writing of the Memorial Hall example, James states that "The percept here not only *verifies* the concept, proves its function of knowing that percept to be true, but the percept's existence as the terminus of the chain of intermediaries *creates* the function."[95] While functions of knowing can be distinguished according both to their starting points and the paths of conjunction they follow, the most important similarity and dissimilarity they have depends on their termini. The fact that two functional chains of intermediaries share the same terminus makes them functionally similar, and that functional similarity, on James's view, allows for substitution: one chain for another. Interestingly, this account of substitution is, for James, what the philosophical notion of "representation" amounts to in a philosophy of pure experience.

The most important case of substitution in human life, James thinks, is the substitution of conceptual paths for perceptual ones:

> Not only do they yield inconceivably rapid transitions; but, owing to the "universal" character which they frequently possess, and to their capacity for association with one another in great systems, they outstrip the tardy consecutions of the things themselves, and sweep us on towards our ultimate termini in a far more labor-saving way than the following of trains of sensible perception ever could.[96]

Much as computer modeling now makes possible research that in the past could hardly be afforded or executed in a short period of time, so James finds our conceptual thought to be a potentially efficacious short cut compared to pursuing everything in its first intention. Instead of building a bridge completely by trial and error, we have learned to calculate the forces involved, building the bridge once rather than, perhaps, five times. In short, the feature of substitution that holds for different processes of knowledge about facilitates our acting on the world by making it, at least potentially, more efficient.

The second important feature of James's functional account of knowledge about is closely related to this first aspect. It involves the issue of

[94] Functions are typically characterized by their product, not their cause. In the history of philosophy, functional explanation became popular in the nineteenth century as a form of teleological explanation that allowed for sophisticated, indeterminate evolution. Marx's notion of history is a prime example of this, different from James's understanding in detail but similar in its basic prospective orientation. For the prospective character of James's thought, see *inter alia* James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 43; "Is Radical Empiricism Solipsistic?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 121.

[95] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 31.

[96] Ibid., p. 32.

actual versus virtual knowing. Although mediate functions of knowing are metaphysically discriminated by their termini, pursuing a train of associated pure experiences phenomenologically involves both the passing of time and a variation in discrete pure experiences known immediately. Mediate knowledge for the subject is, therefore, in transit or in process, and while it is being mediated its validity is not yet verified or present. This situation, where the mind does not yet enjoy direct acquaintance with its object, but where it is engaged in a process that objectively does lead to the terminus, is a situation that James distinguishes as "virtual knowing." By virtue of the "retroactive validating power" of the percept, James writes, "we were *virtual* knowers of the Hall long before we were certified to have been its actual knowers."[97]

The virtuality of knowledge about when in process makes possible a rather practical function of thought, the substitution of virtual knowing for actual knowing in any given instance. On James's view one can even "intentionally" not pursue a valid function of mediated knowing to its terminus, instead substituting its starting point for its functional completion in another context.[98] "*To continue thinking unchallenged is, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, our practical substitute for knowing in the completed sense*," James writes.[99] We can see, then, that the mediate character of knowledge about makes possible two extremely powerful conceptual functions – substitution and virtual knowing, both of which further facilitate objective reference. The frequent combination and employment of these functions, however, necessitates a conception of truth.

The pragmatic conception of truth

In a sense, throughout the account of both the metaphysical thesis of pure experience and the twofold cognitive relation, I (if not also James) have also been begging the question of truth. James's intention in articulating radical empiricism is to provide a philosophical account wherein "experience and reality come to the same thing."[100] On such a formally monistic view, there is for James no radical distinction in principle – no inherent distinction in kind – between the world thought of and the world as it is in its first intention.[101] Thus many of the

97 Ibid., p. 34. 98 Nouns and paper money are both good examples of this.

99 James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 34. 100 Ibid., p. 30.

101 This does not follow directly from the claim that experience and reality come to the same thing, although it does follow from James's understanding of that claim as I have outlined it here.

worries of philosophical dualists about truth are avoided. Additionally, since the relations in this world are simply taken as factual under radical empiricism, there is no intellectual need for an all-knower or transcendental power to assure that the world in fact holds together, as James's rationalist contemporaries argue. The vexing question of the nature and origin of truth (or Truth) as it has traditionally been construed appears, then, to have been evaded by James to a significant degree.

That certainly turns out to be the case with direct acquaintance phenomenologically, and with experiences of actual, terminated chains of intermediaries constituting knowledge about, such as James's Memorial Hall example. Given radical empiricism, in many applications the problem of truth seems to have taken care of itself. Unfortunately, the situation is not quite as positive as it seems. Although James generally presumes only situations of actual knowing (which are inherently "truthful" to some degree) in discussing radical empiricism, he also intimates that any "truth" of direct acquaintance can be called into question by superseding pure experiences.[102] Additionally, he asserts that the majority of our mediated knowledge about does not involve actual termination in its object. Only a limited set of possible circumstances, then, are accounted for by radical empiricism's twofold account of knowing. It is here that pragmatism is needed to fill out James's *Weltanschauung*.[103]

James's pragmatism was introduced initially in 1898 in a talk to the Philosophical Union of the University of California at Berkeley, titled "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results." In that piece James leans heavily, although selectively, on Peirce's "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," articulating what he claims is "Peirce's Principle," or the "principle of pragmatism":

> To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what effects of a conceivably practical kind the object may involve – what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare.

[102] I place "truth" in quotation marks here because truth for James strictly applies to beliefs, propositions, or thoughts, where reality applies to their objects. ("Realities are not *true*, they *are*; and beliefs are true of them," writes James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 106.) As direct acquaintance is the phenomenological analogue of pure experience (reality), strictly speaking direct acquaintance is neither true nor false, always passing rather as real. Insofar as we reflect on or conceptualize pure experiences, however, those second intentional reflections admit of truthfulness with respect to the object (reality) to which they refer, and the question arises.

[103] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 6, for his claim about the advancement of radical empiricism through pragmatism's theory of truth.

Our conception of these effects, then, is for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.[104]

This pragmatic principle as rendered by James looks strikingly similar to the articulation of mediate cognitive relations I have discussed in the last few pages, although James uses "sensation" in 1898 as a stand-in for "pure experience" or "direct acquaintance." While one might pursue meaning (or clarity) virtually in a world merely thought of, finding out *concretely* what a concept means on James's rendition of the pragmatic principle requires tracing that concept through its intermediaries to its actual terminus. That terminus – its substantive content and its practical effects – proves to be all that the object means. The pragmatic principle of James, then, fits hand in glove with the view advanced in his radical empiricism.

Putting aside for now the issue of whether James's world-view itself is "true," the question of truth arises critically in his radically empiricist *Weltanschauung* in two particular cases, both of which depend on the dynamic ability of different bits of pure experience to be substituted for each other in functional groups of associates. The first of these circumstances involves substituting *virtual* knowing for actual knowing in the case of ordinary objects:

I speak also of ideas which we might verify if we would take the trouble, but which we hold for true altho unterminated perceptually, because nothing says "no" to us, and there is no contradicting truth in sight.[105]

James's employment of "ideas" and "perceptually" must be taken in the context of his thesis of pure experience, in which these two modalities of pure experience are ontologically of the same order. What he has in mind in the case of ordinary objects is the substitution of a conceptual – a relatively abstract – pure experience for a more intimate and sensory one which is, nonetheless, available in its first intention as a pure experience. This substitution happens through a conceptual act,

[104] James, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results," *Pragmatism*, p. 259. James paraphrases Peirce liberally. Peirce's text reads: "Our idea of anything *is* our idea of its sensible effects . . . consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearing, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." See C. S. Peirce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear," *Selected Writings: Values in a Universe of Chance*, Philip Wiener (ed.) (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 124. Interestingly, James's rendition of this principle in *Pragmatism* adds the modifier "whether immediate or remote" to the phrase "Our conception of these effects" in the last sentence. See James, *Pragmatism*, p. 29.

[105] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 34.

involving the introduction of a belief or proposition about an object in place of that object. The question of truth in this circumstance is not an empty question; once raised, however, it is tantamount merely to asking for actual verification that the function substituted (through the conceptual act) for the terminus in question in fact leads continuously through a sequence of intervening pure experiences to that terminus (object). If I were to assert that the mail had come today, someone could question the truth of that assertion, and we might go and look in my mailbox to see if, indeed, it had come. In such cases the question of truth is not exactly trivial, but it is neither theoretically nor practically problematic given James's radically empiricist world-view, since it is tantamount to requesting verification of the reference of an idea (belief, proposition) to an available pure experience in the first place.[106]

The second case in which substitution raises the question of truth is more complex, involving ideas (representations or propositions) that could not be verified *directly* in immediate pure experiences – in the facts that just are – even if we were to take the trouble.[107] These ideas and representations are among what James frequently refers to as *denkmittel*, that is, "means by which we handle facts by thinking them"; however, these particular concepts are *denkmittel* of a peculiar sort.[108] They exist not simply as "copies" that facilitate thought, but also at times as functionally unique additions to the world of pure experience, additions which themselves cannot be thought to be representations of anything particularly discrete in our experience. These sorts of ideas are, at least in part, our own contributions, and as such they facilitate certain functions and actions within the world. Among these are members of some of the classes of belief James discusses in "The Will to Believe" – conceptions such as truth, the good, God, pure experience, and electrons (i.e., philosophical or "hypersensible" conceptions); objects on the back side of, say, Pluto (i.e., unexperienced objects); and any

[106] Interestingly, most of James's discussion in "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth" can be subsumed under this rubric. Although I render it as unproblematic, the discussion was much more contentious within the context of that book because James wrote *Pragmatism* without the overt aid of his radical empiricism. See James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 95–113.

[107] These concepts admit of being, themselves, pure experiences, but they are for the most part pure experiences of a highly abstract and often wide perspective, relatively foreign rather than intimate, less sensory and more relational in an external fashion. What I mean by this is that on James's view one can experience the concept "nation" in its first intention, but it is an experience that is, sensorially, rather empty, compared to the complexity and richness of tasting a papaya (to reinvoke my earlier example).

[108] For the explanation of *denkmittel*, see James, *Pragmatism*, p. 84.

number of other cognitive inventions that humans employ as a means of representing, aggregating, and working on the world.[109]

An obvious objection is that in allowing these sorts of "objects" into his world-view, James has abdicated his methodological restriction to experience. By counting these objects within the world of pure experience, he is not, however, claiming that they in fact transcend experience. On the contrary, we may all have a pure experience of concepts of "truth," or "beauty," or even "Napoleon," at any time we please. The point that James means to indicate is that these objects share the peculiar characteristic of not being concretely sensory, and of therefore not admitting of the intimacy and richness characteristic of perceptual instances of direct acquaintance. Some of these objects cannot be experienced because of technical limitations of our sensory apparatus (for example, subatomic particles, objects across the galaxy, and, James thinks, perhaps the divine); others of these cannot be experienced because they are inherently aggregations that are too broad in scope for our pure experiencing (for example, a nation, or interestingly, perhaps also the divine);[110] still others such as historical personages and their actions can no longer be verified because they have ceased to exist in the first intention.[111] The "content" of these objects, if you will, taken in their first intention, cannot be said to be (or be experienced as) contained within their pure experience.[112] Rather, their discrete "content" consists exclusively in their first intentional, yet *external*, relations to other pure experiences – or, in other words, their intentionality itself.

Interestingly, all substitutionary pure experiences – those with and those without the possibility of direct acquaintance – must be understood as *denkmittel* in the most direct sense. That is, their value resides

[109] See James, *Will to Believe*, pp. 15–16, 27, passim. James mentions electrons, mind-stuff, and God in *Meaning of Truth* as among "realities of a hypersensible order" (p. 130).

[110] For further discussion on the technical limitations regarding the divine, see chapter 3.

[111] This last group, objects which have ceased to exist in the first intention, could be considered to constitute a *third*, and rather problematic, class of substitutes for which the question of truth arises, if one interprets James's experience principle to require metaphysically that everything (continue to) be experienced by something to (continue to) exist. On such a strongly idealistic interpretation, the truth of formulations about the past becomes highly problematic, changing depending on future experiencing, and perhaps never being adequately justified. (Josiah Royce pointed out this apparent consequence to James in 1908 in response to James's "The Meaning of the Word Truth" – see Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, pp. 735–6.) This is *not* the interpretation of experience that I have been advocating, but it is one that James's interpreters have frequently embraced.

[112] This may appear to be a concept–referent confusion, but given James's formally monistic metaphysics and his understanding of the immediacy of the modality of direct acquaintance, even when applied to concepts, such a statement indicates as well as possible the peculiarity of such pure experiences.

primarily if not exclusively in their purporting to *work on* the rest of our pure experiences (taken in the second intention), varying according to the particular external relations that are associated with each concept and the uses we may find for it. All substitutionary pure experiences, then, are to be treated as functional, fallible hypotheses in a radically empiricist philosophy, since their functional relations are the only experiential thing that they can be known-as.

In the case of the latter class of these objects – those with whose content one cannot be directly acquainted because it has passed on or disappeared – truth is obviously a problem that cannot be *directly* resolved in anything but the most trivial sense. One can in some sense verify that by a particular concept a particular individual intends a discrete set of external relations or functions. This limited direct verification, however, is merely equivalent to the notion of meaning as discussed above, since that sort of direct acquaintance can apply to both abstract and concrete pure experiences. The momentous question of *truth* for James, therefore, has to do not simply with the relations indicated by a particular idea whose concrete content (or object) cannot be directly verified, but rather with the actuality or efficacy of those relations. To put this another way, one must evaluate the concrete success such an idea has in serving as *denkmittel* through the world of pure experience, where the latter is actually populated both by independently existing pure experiences (objects and ejects) and by the varied and complex range of conceptual pure experiences that are what James calls our "stock of truths."[113] Insofar as such an idea leads satisfactorily – that is, without jar – back into and through the stream or world of experience, it may be considered to that degree true. As such, it also becomes a more integral addition to the stream of experience it works on.[114]

James's pragmatism is obviously a complex topic, worthy in many respects of the extensive treatment it has received in the secondary literature. Many of these works treat James's pragmatic understanding of truth independently, following his cue from the preface to *Pragmatism*, where he writes that pragmatism and radical empiricism are independent.[115] Placed in the context of his radical empiricism, however,

[113] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 98.

[114] "Truth we conceive to mean everywhere, not duplication, but addition." James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 41, written in 1904.

[115] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 6. James does say that one can reject radical empiricism and still be a pragmatist, though he does not specify exactly what that would look like.

most of the details of pragmatism's theory of meaning and truth can be seen as rather closely related to, if not also actually dependent on, James's radically empiricist way of thinking. Given my purposes in this chapter, I shall only address two further aspects (both of which I have already invoked) that are central to James's pragmatic conception of truth: his concept of satisfaction and the inherent sociality (or communal character) of knowledge and truth.[116]

James's conception of satisfaction is, in many respects, analogous to the notion of "leading" that dominates his discussion of the mediate cognitive relations constituting knowledge about. A phenomenological description, "satisfaction" for James indicates the state of having the external intentional character of a pure experience *not* be contradicted through either unexpected discontinuity or a lack of termination. From the broader metaphysical perspective, satisfaction results phenomenologically when a dynamic of cognitively continuous relations is effected or realized to the degree expected and possible. In the case where one makes a truth claim about a pure experience that has a sensory content (object) with which one can in principle be directly acquainted, satisfaction ultimately involves the mind enjoying direct acquaintance with its object.[117]

Not all of our concepts or representative bits of pure experience are both concrete and available. In the case of concepts referring to concrete pure experiences no longer extant, for example, satisfaction is limited to following as far as possible relations that should be the case. Partial termination – in some independently existing but integrally related pure experiences – may be possible, such as in the case of finding a related archaeological remain of an event or person, and satisfaction would consist in acquaintance with that.[118] Some of our representing pure experiences may, however, be wholly abstract from the concrete, composed as they are *only* of intentional, external relations. In the case of these sorts of objects, satisfaction likewise involves a lack of jar or discontinuity where there was to be continuity (or vice versa). Nonetheless, it never involves direct acquaintance with a concrete content directly associated with (or part of) the object. Thus satisfaction in these

[116] See chapter 5 for more discussion of truth.

[117] See *inter alia* James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 104.

[118] The case of Julius Caesar's manuscript, of which James sees a copy, provides an example of this (James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 121). Recall that for James pure experience is of varying degrees of complexity; therefore, for a complex "object" some portion may remain after others are gone. Experience comes discretely, as does consciousness in *Principles*, and thus it can also cease to exist by differing quantities.

cases must be fundamentally indirect, always composed only of lack of jar or disconfirmation, and that to differing extents.[119] Overall, then, "satisfaction" is a relative term for James, in terms both of the degree achieved and the kind expected (varying as do the "stuffs" of pure experience according to the particular object intended or represented). Through its dependence on satisfaction, "truth" too is inherently relative, making "trueness" perhaps a more representative term for James than "truth" with reference to this range of indirect "objects."[120]

The remaining issue concerning truth to discuss is that of its sociality. The mediate function of knowledge about (to which the function of truth applies) is inherently open and subject to social exchange. This follows directly from both James's factual thesis of radical empiricism and his metaphysical thesis of pure experience. In admitting that external relations are given *within* experience and are crucial to the possibility of mediate knowing, one admits that knowledge about itself already relies metaphysically on what one might call a social relation among pure experiences themselves. This implies not only that the "objects" referred to in knowledge about are primarily "social," but also that the truths (or true beliefs) so derived have an inherently social character through their reliance on this metaphysical "sociality."[121] This social character of aggregated bits of pure experience functioning as objects thus manifests itself epistemologically through concrete phenomenological experiences of verification and particular productions of truth.[122]

In addition to being social in this metaphysical sense, there is a more ordinary character to the sociality of truth in James, one that depends on the perspectival or relative character of all knowing that follows from radical empiricism. Both direct acquaintance and knowledge about for James are determined, or conditioned, by the perspective of the

119 James is also aware that these cases requiring indirect verification are frequently recalcitrant to being falsified, offering such great satisfaction as they do. Having in mind ultimate or "final" realities such as electrons or God in *The Meaning of Truth*, James notes that knowledge of the hypersensible is "an outgrowth of our cognitive experience," forming "an inevitable regulative postulate in everyone's thinking." He notes further that "our notion of them is the most abundantly suggested and satisfied of all our beliefs, and the last to suffer doubt." See pp. 130–1.

120 For a discussion of the relative character of truth, see James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 147. For further discussion of what James means by "truth" as absolute, see chapter 5.

121 Interestingly, this is also the basis through which James can explain individual minds as social, involving different elements and aspects (selves) within them both synchronically and diachronically, an interest of his deriving from his psychology.

122 For a more elaborate discussion of the social character of James's metaphysics, see Lamberth, "Interpreting the Universe After a Social Analogy."

individual knower. Experiences of direct acquaintance often appear as relatively "private" sensations or states of pure experiencing. Insofar as we maintain consciousness or memory of them, however, we transform them into concepts that we refer to as "objects" that have reality. (This is, in fact, what we mean by "object.") These "objects," insofar as we claim them to be real, cannot be considered to be either strictly limited to the private tenor of our pure experience or restricted to our particular experiencing. Rather, insofar as our experiences are claimed as real (as opposed to hallucinatory), they are inherently proposed as public – accessible to others' direct acquaintance through their reference to the object, but also subject to others' particular claims. These diverse claims about shared objects from different knowers thus lead to (and demand) cooperative processes of verification and public judgments concerning truths (and, more to the point, the reality of their "objects"). Truth claiming is precisely the discursive process of attributing a particular reality to a shared object on James's view.

We see this sociality manifest most clearly in his extraordinarily social conception of a "stock of truths" with which all our thinking and knowing must square:

> All human thinking gets discursified; we exchange ideas; we lend and borrow verifications, get them from one another by means of social intercourse. All truth thus gets verbally built out, stored up, and made available for everyone.[123]

This store of truths, which we might also accurately consider to involve human "additions" to the world of pure experience, is the location for our basic language of everyday concrete nouns and verbs, which we can all follow rather closely back into direct acquaintance. Much more importantly, it is also the reservoir of all of our conceptual tools (*denkmittel* and hypersensible objects), as well as all of the historically unenduring pure experiences to which we have only indirect access that can, by virtue of their having completely ceased to be, no longer be directly verified. As such, this socially constituted stock of truthful ideas (themselves now potential pure experiences as well) is, like the concrete pure experiences to which it relates (or is related), of inestimable practical value for human knowers.

The sociality of truth is enhanced yet one step more for those who, as James was, are interested in pursuing a "metaphysical view" of reality, that is, an understanding of it in the broadest perspective. To

[123] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 102.

develop such an understanding, one must engage both the immediate pure experiences distributed to oneself and the concrete pure experiences available through the mediation of other knowers' abstracting powers that are applied to their own pure experiences. Since the most pressing questions of *truth* (rather than simply verification) have to do with the most aggregating and abstract of the (metaphysical) conceptions that we employ to structure our thought and action in the world, for James the sociality of pragmatism's understanding of truth is crucial, both as definition and as practical guide.[124] Solipsism might well be possible (in the sense of not self-contradictory) on such a view, but it is by no means philosophically adequate to the human factual situation.[125] On James's view truth and the process of establishing it is social, then, most basically because reality itself – including the knowers and the known, concepts and objects, and the true and the real – is social in the most fundamental and human senses.

The thesis of pluralistic panpsychism

In introducing the components of James's radically empiricist world-view I included the thesis of *pluralistic* panpsychism, even though he explicitly did not take up the subject in his 1904–5 published presentations.[126] That he considered his own position to be in a general sense panpsychist should be of little dispute.[127] Panpsychism during James's era became a rather hotly debated and even common philosophical doctrine, indicating generally the view that all ontological elements are inherently psychic (conscious), or at least disposed to psychic connection, as well as psychically active.[128] James's radically empiricist world-view is, obviously, closely related to this sort of monistic scheme,

[124] See the discussion of intimacy in chapter 4 for the connection of sociality to James's conception of both rationality and adequate philosophy.

[125] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 115, for James's treatment of solipsism.

[126] See James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 43, for James's reference to panpsychism.

[127] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 141, where he subsumes the philosophy of radical empiricism (cf. p. 20) under the rubric of "a pluralistic panpsychic view." See also the 1903–4 manuscript "The Many and the One," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 43. This is discussed in detail in chapter 4.

[128] Charles Strong, for example, argues that "since consciousness is the only reality of which we have any immediate knowledge, and therefore our only sample of what reality is like, we have no other conception of a reality. Hence we must assume things-in-themselves to be mental in their nature; and this is the more necessary, that individual minds arise out of them by evolution." See Strong, *Why the Mind Has a Body* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), p. 295.

substituting "pure experience" taken collectively, however, for consciousness. His system also compares favorably with the dynamism of panpsychism – its notion that all ontological components can and do act upon one another – in at least a weak sense. What ultimately distinguishes James's version of panpsychism, however, is the ontological indeterminacy (or ambidextrousness) of his fundamental category "experience" relative to the mind/matter, mental/physical split. Formally monistic, James's panpsychism is at its core a *pluralistic* panpsychism, pluralistic as to the nature of the things which may be psychically continuous. "There are," he writes, "as many stuffs as there are 'natures' in the things experienced."[129] Pluralistic panpsychism, then, resists the reductive force of idealism that privileges mind over matter.

In addition to dynamism and ontological indeterminacy, panpsychism stands for another philosophical issue that is crucial to James's project: the individual autonomy of the ontological elements of reality. This question arises for James and his contemporaries in reaction to the kinds of idealism advocated by Bradley and Royce. Such positions argue for the necessity of an all-knowing mind or God to maintain the individuality and specificity of any individual ontological element, much less any whole comprising them. Seen in this light, panpsychism in general is a form of *empiricism* in precisely the logical sense that James uses the term: it explains the wholes by the parts, rather than the parts by the wholes.[130] Where most panpsychists formulate this ontological autonomy by claiming that all bits of consciousness are, at base, self-conscious, James looks instead to the fundamental character and self-sufficiency of determinate external relations, conjunctive and disjunctive. This issue – what during 1904–9 he often calls the question of "co-ness" – proved philosophically to be one of the most central to James's own mind regarding the viability of his radically empiricist *Weltanschauung*. As he did not arrive at a clear public specification of his panpsychism prior to writing his Hibbert Lectures (*A Pluralistic Universe*) in 1908, and since the development of that discussion is central to my concern with his religious views, I have reserved in-depth discussion of this crucial aspect of his world-view for chapter 4.

[129] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 14. This pluralism also connects with James's contingent teleology and his understanding of the importance of both thought and action. See chapters 3 and 4.

[130] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 141–2, for James's characterization of panpsychism as empiricism; see ibid., p. 9, and "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22, for the references to parts and wholes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

James took the opportunity on 16 and 18 November 1905 in his course on metaphysics to review what he called the "congenial consequences" of his own metaphysical view:

> It redeems us from abstraction, from carrying on our book keeping in two accounts, like Sunday Christianity.
>
> It restores to philosophy the temper of science and of practical life, brings the ideal *into things*.
>
> It allows order to be increasing – therefore is a philosophy of *progress*.
>
> It makes *us* factors of the order.
>
> It frankly interprets the universe after a *social* analogy.
>
> It admits different systems of causation relatively independent, – *Chance*, therefore, in so far forth.
>
> Take evolution au grand serieux
>
> . . . if evolution – Gods may be one of the results.[131]

For James a philosophy of pure experience, a radically empiricist philosophy, is a thoroughgoing metaphysical view of the broadest scope, integrating all the aspects of our lives and our world that we can manage – both our concrete and abstract experiences and our prospective aims and visions. James's view seeks, above all, to do violence neither to our fundamental desire for rationality nor to our intimate sense of the concreteness and detail of both the world and our action in it. It is, then, a *human* philosophical vision, underscoring the importance of human knowledge and action while seeing humans within a context not wholly under their control.

In concluding "A World of Pure Experience" in 1904, James characterized his new philosophical view with a single, powerful metaphor, calling it a *mosaic* philosophy, and emphasizing its metaphysical pluralism, its prospective orientation, and its methodological refusal to reach outside of experience for explanations:

> At the outset of my essay, I called it a mosaic philosophy. In actual mosaics the pieces are held together by their bedding, for which bedding the substances, transcendental egos, or absolutes of other philosophies may be taken to stand. In radical empiricism there is no bedding; it is as if the pieces clung together by their edges, the transitions experienced between them forming their cement. Of course, such a metaphor is misleading, for in actual experience the more substantive and the more transitive parts run into each other continuously, there is in general no separateness needing to be overcome by

[131] James, "Notes for Philosophy 9: Metaphysics (1905–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, pp. 367–8.

an external cement; and whatever separateness is actually experienced is not overcome, it stays and counts as separateness to the end. But the metaphor serves to symbolize the fact that experience itself, taken at large, can grow by its edges.[132]

This mosaic is, at one and the same time, a schematic of the world as a whole, and an impression of James's own understanding of the issues involved in treating the world as a *whole*. If one considers James's work as a whole, the scope of this project is quite foreign to some of his earlier, more limited enterprises. In 1890 in the preface to *The Principles of Psychology*, for example, he overtly restricted his discussion to both the point of view of natural science in general and the perspective of psychology – the science of finite individual minds – in particular. In the chapter that follows, I look back to the period beginning with the publication of James's psychology texts to trace both the origins and development of this wider, metaphysical, mosaic philosophy.

[132] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 42.

CHAPTER 2

From psychology to religion: pure experience and radical empiricism in the 1890s

In the preceding chapter I sought to characterize in some detail James's radically empiricist *Weltanschauung*, dividing it into components for the purposes of analysis and explication, and treating the overall view and its constituent parts from a systematic perspective. While treating James's views systematically is one of the overall aims of this book, I am also advancing a particular historical argument about the development of his philosophical views: namely, that the bulk of his radically empiricist world-view was formulated during the 1890s rather than the early 1900s. This interpretation is significant in itself for understanding James's thought. It is particularly crucial, however, for my interests in his views on religion, since his primary work between the two time periods in question was his avowed "last will and testament" on religion, *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* As chapter 3 seeks to offer a fresh interpretation of *Varieties* in light of James's radical empiricism, in this chapter I intend to establish the basic chronology for the development of the major tenets of James's radically empiricist philosophy, as well as explore certain details of the view as it appears in 1895.

James's turn to philosophy – metaphysics in particular – is often thought to occur later in the decade, coinciding roughly with three quite public events: the publication of *The Will to Believe* in 1897; James's reappointment as Professor of Philosophy in 1897 (from 1889 to 1896 he was Professor of Psychology); and his delivery of the lecture "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results" in 1898 at Berkeley, wherein he publicly introduces his pragmatism.[1] In the argument that

[1] Perry is an exception here, taking care to note James's growing ambivalence toward doing psychology through the nineties. Perry, however, characterizes James's philosophical work in the 1890s as focused on ethics and religion, ignoring his metaphysical investigations and interests, and has likely set the tone for James scholarship on this point. See Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 363. Kuklick is also somewhat more circumspect; nonetheless he places all of James's metaphysical work after the turn of the twentieth century. See Kuklick, *Rise of American Philosophy*, pp. 319ff. Wild concurs with Kuklick, explicitly putting metaphysical issues

follows, I locate the overt transition from psychology to philosophy earlier, associating it in particular with the epilogue to *Psychology: Briefer Course*. In addition to its relative adequacy to the textual evidence, this interpretation has the benefit of finding James's change in focus to have a rational basis, driven not merely by the tedium of the psychological material and experimental process (as Perry suggests), or even by James's widely reputed but debatable peripateticism. Instead, on this view his reorientation to metaphysics can be seen, at least in part, to be motivated by problems emerging from the psychological material on which he had been working for more than fifteen years.[2]

Launched by the two-volume *Principles of Psychology* and continued with the 1892 *Psychology: Briefer Course*, James's work in the 1890s is worthy of extended discussion. The broader scope of my interest requires, however, a more selective, though I hope no less persuasive, treatment. I begin, then, with a brief consideration of James's own methodological self-understanding in his two psychology texts, attending in particular to his characterization of the status of psychology and philosophy respectively. After establishing how James sees his own "natural science" approach to psychology to mandate metaphysical work, I briefly chronicle the circumstances of the shift in his own areas of inquiry. Following that, I turn to two texts dating from the middle of the decade. Via close, albeit selective, textual analysis, I argue that James's definitive move to his radically empiricist *Weltanschauung* – in the overwhelming majority of its details – is made by the end of 1895, a full nine years prior to the two crucial essays discussed in chapter 1 as the public debut of his metaphysical world-view. This will set the stage for, and even compel, the reinterpretation of *Varieties* that constitutes chapter 3.

such as the problem of dualism in "the last phase" of James's life. He reaches as far back as 1898, but overlooks the evidence in the early part of the decade. See Wild, *Radical Empiricism of William James*, pp. 359–60. In contrast, Myers avoids strict periodizations, seeing the turn to philosophical issues as overlapping the psychological work. See, e.g., Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, p. 313.

[2] My interpretation thus generally concurs with Eugene Taylor's recent analysis of James's growing concerns about positivistic psychology as he wrote *Principles*. See Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), particularly pp. 25–39. Taylor's interest is more explicitly centered on the details of psychological texts and materials themselves, and particularly on the influence of experimental psycho-pathological data on James's reasoning; mine in this chapter, by contrast, is focused on James's explicit methodological orientation, as well as on evidence for his having overtly formulated a coherent, novel metaphysical system as such. Taylor's more detailed reading of *Principles* in particular demonstrates cogently that many of the problems mandating radical empiricism and some of its nascent components emerge for James through the 1880s as he composed the text of *Principles*, thus complementing my argument.

PSYCHOLOGY AS A NATURAL SCIENCE

One of James's most frequently recognized achievements is his contribution to the late nineteenth-century transformation of psychology from a subdiscipline of philosophy into an independent field within the natural sciences. Some of James's fame on this score is due to his efforts at launching the then-new "experimental psychology" in the mid 1870s, more or less concurrently with the activities of Wilhelm Wundt in Germany.[3] His training in medicine and his use of the laboratory notwithstanding, James's principal contributions to the migration of psychology from philosophy to the natural sciences were not themselves empirical. Instead, his most important efforts were more wide-ranging and theoretical, reflected most clearly in the scope and breadth of his *magnum opus* in the field, *The Principles of Psychology*.

By the 1890 publication of *Principles* (a book more than a decade in the making), James treats this transformation of psychology's own self-understanding as a *fait accompli*. In the preface he introduces his own perspective on psychology by way of discussing a methodological trait shared by all of the natural sciences: "every natural science," he writes, "assumes certain data uncritically, and declines to challenge the elements between which its own 'laws' obtain."[4] As such an endeavor, psychology, "the science of finite individual minds," assumes certain basic components. James catalogs those data undergirding his text as "1) *thoughts and feelings*, and 2) *a physical world* in time and space with which they coexist and which 3) *they know*."[5] Thus one might characterize his approach as broadly taking for granted both traditional mind–matter dualism and the fact (or reality) of cognition as a relation between them.

Because these elements are assumed uncritically, they are not themselves what psychology as a natural science seeks to discern.[6] James continues in the preface, specifying the aim and limitations of psychology:

> This book, assuming that thoughts and feelings exist and are vehicles of knowledge, thereupon contends that psychology when she has ascertained the

[3] See Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, pp. 3–15, for a more in-depth discussion of the controversy over the exact "founding" of and contribution to experimental psychology in the United States.

[4] James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 6. [5] Ibid., p. 6.

[6] James asserts this in the introduction despite the obvious ambiguities raised by his metaphysical forays on these uncritically assumed elements that are interspersed through the text. These forays are not, however, as systematic as the methodological presentations in the introduction and conclusion. For elucidation of James's divergences see Taylor, *William James on Consciousness Beyond the Margin*, particularly chapter 3.

empirical correlation of the various sorts of thought or feeling with definite conditions of the brain, can go no farther – can go no farther, that is, as a natural science. If she goes farther she becomes metaphysical.[7]

Psychology as a natural science, then, really has two tasks. First, it must descriptively categorize specific mental states (thoughts and feelings) and specific brain states along empirically observable and verifiable lines. Second, it must correlate these, mental state with brain state, again along empirical lines. In James's psychology this correlation most frequently takes its cue from the mental states, afterward seeking their physical counterparts. In contrast to this correlative set of questions, however, the ground-level question of what a brain state or what a mental state might be as such, or whether they are unified or disparate, does not admit of an answer from natural-science psychology. Such a query is regarded by James as fundamentally metaphysical, and thus beyond the reach of the proper resources of psychology as natural science.[8]

A related peculiarity of James's psychology is its preoccupation with cognition rather than causality as the primary dynamic to be explored between mental states and the material world. That is, while his psychology is interested in correlating the material world with the mind, this correlation does not conform to that of a strict materialist who seeks to demonstrate the epiphenomenal or wholly determined (and derivative) character of mind. Rather, in focusing on cognition – knowing – James's psychology sets out to *elaborate* how mental states are both motivated by an external environment and adaptive in relation to it, rather than reducing each mental state to its materialistic cause. This Darwinistic inclination of James's psychology is well known, but it is noteworthy in this context because it highlights the particular metaphysical perspective operative in his conception of natural science in general, as well as in psychology in particular.[9]

7 Ibid., p. 6.

8 James does state explicitly in *Psychology: Briefer Course* that he has adopted as a working hypothesis the strong statement of "physiological psychology," namely, that mental action may be related to brain action as effect to cause, even going so far as to consider this a law of nature. He goes on, however, to point out that this hypothesis sheds absolutely no light at all on the *nature* of thought, and thus cannot be categorized as an endorsement on his part of pure materialism. See William James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 13.

9 James would be the first to say that one cannot pursue science free of metaphysical bias. For the Darwinistic element of James's psychology, see William R. Woodward's introduction to William James, *Essays in Philosophy*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. xi–xxxix, and Robert J.

The line between metaphysical issues and the empirical questions of the natural sciences is not easily or neatly drawn. James's own writing in *Principles,* while frequently within the parameters of its task (that is, asking after the empirical correlation of the brain to the mental state), is rarely devoid of metaphysical speculation. When James abridges and revises *Principles* into a one-volume classroom text, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, in 1892, the comfort of claiming merely to be doing "descriptive psychology" (which had come so readily to James in 1884 in "The Function of Cognition" and was marginally less evident in parts of *Principles*) is clearly strained.[10] James retains the central characterization of psychology as a natural science and the statement of his presuppositions, but he also adds an epilogue, "Psychology and Philosophy." In that final word James reflects explicitly on the relation of the enterprise of psychology to metaphysics, raising serious questions about the particularities of his own approach to psychology as a natural science.

James begins the epilogue with a discussion of "What the Word Metaphysics Means." Although he arrives at this issue narratively via the free-will/determinism debate, James's comments bear significantly on his general conception of the relation of the natural sciences to other areas of inquiry, as well as to what he recognizes as the broader forum of metaphysics or philosophy. In the introductions to both *Principles* and *Briefer Course*, James characterizes his psychology primarily as a "natural science," appropriating not only the empirical orientation of the natural sciences, but also their relatively high status among means of human inquiry. Here, at the end of the road formed by the two texts, James refers to psychology as a "special science." This shift in terminology does not in any way constitute a rejection of the basic thesis of "physiological psychology" that sets his text squarely within the natural sciences. It does, however, indicate a modulation in his sights and interests.

Richards, "The Personal Equation in Science: William James's Psychological and Moral Uses of the Darwinian Theory," *A William James Renascence: Four Essays by Young Scholars*, Mark Schwehn (ed.), *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 30 (October 1982), 387–425. Generally, for James's use of and debt to Darwin, see Henry S. Levinson, *Science, Metaphysics, and the Chance of Salvation: An Interpretation of the Thought of William James*, AAR Dissertation Series (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), pp. 17–33.

10 James, "The Function of Cognition," *Meaning of Truth*, p. 14. James worked on *The Principles of Psychology* from 1878 to 1890. He wrote "The Function of Cognition" in 1884, and first published it in *Mind* in 1885, although it is best known for its appearance in 1909 in *The Meaning of Truth*. Reading "The Function of Cognition" only in the context of its later publication often leads one to overlook the substantive differences between James's later, more metaphysical and critical self-understanding and his earlier comfort with the confines of natural science and descriptive psychology.

By associating psychology with natural science in the introduction, James underscores the idea that the observation of empirical data forms the basis of psychology's procedure (as opposed to the "logical" procedure of rational psychology). He thus draws attention to the similarity in method among all of the natural sciences, all the while novelly appropriating that experimental method for psychology. The term "special science" in the epilogue shifts the contrast, however, presenting a much more complicated picture. James's discussion here draws attention not to similarities of method among the natural sciences (as opposed to the "non-natural" sciences), but rather to *differences* of subject matter, interests, and presuppositions among all of the various special sciences. Further, in his discussion James rather surprisingly draws on ethics, mechanics, geology, and psychology, indicating that by "special sciences" he does not mean only the various branches of the natural sciences, but also (at least some of) those of the human sciences as well.[11] Thus where in the introduction James sought to elevate psychology to the level of the natural sciences, all the while attending to psychology's special suppositions and interests, in the epilogue he indicates that, regardless of their differences in method, interest, and even success, there are basic problems shared by *all* of the sciences – natural, human, or otherwise – that cannot be adjudicated from within. Leveling and broadening the playing field in this way, James considers, for instance, ethical claims and conclusions right alongside those of natural psychology or even physics. Interestingly, the modification in nomenclature also foreshadows his eventual rejection of a fundamental mind/matter dualism through his thesis of pure experience, a rejection which manages, however, neither to denigrate the natural sciences and their methods nor to reject dogmatically the conclusions of "non-material" fields of inquiry.[12]

Each of the special sciences manifests the trait (discussed above concerning the natural sciences) of assuming certain elements uncritically.[13]

[11] See James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pp. 395, 13.

[12] This rejection of a fundamental dualism is usually recognized as occurring around 1904, with the publication of "Does Consciousness Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience" in the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*, and later included in the posthumous *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. See below for a discussion of the earlier genesis of James's thesis of "pure experience" in 1895–6.

[13] James's comments about the assumptions of the sciences in the introduction to *Briefer Course*, when reread in this context, admit of a broader scope than just that of the natural sciences, which is the immediate, though not explicit, connotation in the introduction. See James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 9.

In connection with this, the special sciences are also individually characterized by specific and limited interests or needs directly related to the assumptions and hypotheses they pursue.[14] Thus, some problems irrelevant from the standpoint of one special science (for example, determinism in psychology) may be essential from that of another (for example, ethics). When foundational elements, needs, and interests conflict among the special sciences, they cannot be adjudicated meaningfully from within any of the special sciences involved, since it is precisely the basis of one special science which is at odds with that of another. Such conflicts therefore require discussion in the broader, inclusive forum of metaphysics, which James in a rather nice aphorism describes as "only an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly and consistently." Where the special sciences pursue only limited practical goals, metaphysical puzzles serve the purpose of the "attainment of the maximum of possible insight into the world as a whole."[15] Thus a person working in metaphysics must take up the issues that researchers in psychology and the other special sciences can, in their nonetheless productive myopias, usually afford to ignore.

It is not clear at this point in *Briefer Course* how far James thinks psychology as a science can go without broaching the issue of the particular metaphysical assumptions undergirding it. Certainly he does not consider futile his own empirical and synthetic efforts within his stated parameters. Further, he states explicitly that he does *not* consider the issue of determinism to have significant bearing on psychology's ability to meet its own practical goals.[16] In the epilogue, however, he does proceed to indicate what he considers to be the most thorny and opaque metaphysical issues raised (or, perhaps, presumed) by his psychological endeavor, as well as their practical limitations given the observable phenomena of both mind and body. These are: (1) the (psychophysical) "relation of consciousness to the brain"; (2) "the [cognitive] relation of states of mind to their 'objects'"; (3) "the changing character of consciousness"; and (4) the fact that "states of consciousness themselves are not verifiable facts."[17]

Under the first of these rubrics, James considers the crucial issue for his particular natural science understanding of psychology: the nature

[14] For the basic character of James's theory of interest see Levinson, *Science, Metaphysics, and Salvation*, pp. 10f. In James, one of the earliest substantive discussions of interest occurs in "The Sentiment of Rationality," published in *Mind* in 1879 (significantly different from the version later included in *The Will to Believe*). See James, *Essays in Philosophy*, pp. 32–64.

[15] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pp. 395–6. [16] Ibid., p. 395. [17] Ibid., pp. 396–400.

of the correspondence that holds between a unique mental state and the brain, and, by extension, the nature of the mental state and the brain themselves.[18] In this mind/matter debate he recognizes three extant alternatives – the monistic, the spiritualistic, and the atomistic. In a telling move, he ignores the monistic position altogether, simply characterizing it as the view on which mental and brain states are merely inner and outer aspects of the same reality, and thereafter dropping it. The spiritualistic approach, on which the mental state is the reaction of a spiritual entity to the multiple activities of the brain, James finds logically the most unproblematic. It is, however, empirically inadequate, unable to account for abnormal psychic phenomena such as multiple personalities, much less the unverifiable spiritual "entity" itself.[19] Given James's empiricism, the only view he takes seriously here is the atomist's.

On the atomistic account, a mental state is merely an aggregate of the separate consciousnesses of the brain cells. This hypothesis deals relatively well, James thinks, with abnormal psychic phenomena such as multiple personalities, and capably handles empirical advances concerning the discrete involvement of independent areas of the brain in different types of consciousness.[20] Though it is able to account for these unavoidable empirical data, James objects nonetheless to the atomistic account on philosophical grounds. The atomist, James thinks, embraces too narrow a purpose, and manifests too weak a philosophical conscience, seeking only to "unify things in a natural and easy manner."[21] That is, given that the atomist's principal desideratum is simply a "natural and easy" unification of mental units, he or she sees as "far-fetched" the

[18] James's two psychology books are founded on the hypothesis of physiological psychology that "the uniform correlation of brain-states with mind-states is a law of nature." See ibid., p. 13.

[19] Ibid., p. 396.

[20] Multiple personalities are easily handled because the atomist is claiming that minimal bits of consciousness aggregate to make more complicated units. The fact that they did not finally aggregate into one unit per body would not, then, prove difficult to interpret, where for the spiritualist's account this is catastrophic.

[21] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 397. Although James is often referred to as a common-sense realist, this antipathy toward "natural" ways of thinking, usually associated with materialism or atomism, recurs throughout his corpus. See, e.g., James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 72, and "The Miller–Bode Objections," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, pp. 90ff. Common-sense realism (taking common sense seriously) is for James an important component of good philosophy, but it is not the final court of arbitration, particularly in metaphysical discussions. The metaphysician is above all accountable to his or her philosophical conscience, or reason, and one's conscience cannot be content with perplexity or lack of clarity. See chapter 4 for a related discussion of James's understanding of rationality when he claims to be an irrationalist.

question of how "'parts' of consciousness *can* 'combine,'" much less what these parts are (metaphysically).[22] In other words, where the spiritualist is (presumably) overly metaphysical and not adequately empirical, the atomist is not metaphysical enough. James's more acute philosophical conscience and expansive metaphysical interests goad him further than the atomist:

> But the difficulty with the problem of "correspondence" is not only that of solving it, it is that of even stating it in elementary terms . . . Before we can know just what sort of goings-on occur when thought corresponds to a change in the brain, we must know the *subjects* of the goings-on. We must know which sort of mental fact and which sort of cerebral fact are, so to speak, in immediate juxtaposition.[23]

As if this were not problematic enough, James subjects his central psychological tenet to the same question. Pointing out that his principal assumption of the unity of the brain state seems altogether unfounded empirically, James writes that the aggregation of the brain "is a fiction of popular speech," and "the molecular fact [according to the atomist's mechanical philosophy] is the only genuine physical fact."[24]

James's perplexity here concerning the viability of assuming unified brain states and mental states emerges from his concurrent reliance on and dissatisfaction with the available metaphysical theories of mind and matter. His fundamental psychological presupposition itself partakes of both spiritualistic and atomistic components, taking its unity thesis (vis-à-vis mental and brain states) from the former and its attention to physiological elements from the latter. The outcome for James's "unscrupulous assumption" is that "the real in psychics [the unified thought] seems to 'correspond' to the unreal in physics [the unified brain], and *vice versa* [the real molecular fact to the unreal 'part' of consciousness]."[25] This leaves psychology in *practical* peril, since correlating the real to the unreal cannot be considered knowledge in any meaningful sense. In short, the metaphysical options available to James, as well as his applications of them, are woefully inadequate. Thus his

[22] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 397. These two issues, what the nature of consciousness and the brain are, and how parts of consciousness can combine, become the two crucial issues for James's metaphysical speculations. The former is eventually resolved in James's adoption of the thesis of "pure experience," while the latter problem leads him to specify his position further as a version of panpsychism.

[23] Ibid., p. 397. [24] Ibid., pp. 397–8.

[25] For the "unscrupulous assumption," see ibid., p. 13; the quotation is from ibid., p. 398.

conclusions both underlying and interspersed throughout the text, if not all of his observations, are in serious jeopardy.[26]

The remaining problems James raises in the epilogue to *Briefer Course* serve to flesh out this kind of objection to the metaphysics of the day. More importantly for my purposes, however, these brief reflections can also be seen to anticipate directly, both thematically and substantively, certain views that are later associated with James's radical empiricism, broadly construed. Under "The Relation of States of Mind to their 'Objects,'" he focuses on serious problems for the fundamental character of mind/matter dualism:

> such an experience as *blue*, as it is immediately given, can only be called by some neutral name as that of *phenomenon*. It does not *come* to us *immediately* as a relation between two realities, one mental and one physical. It is only when, still thinking of it as the *same* blue, we trace relations between it and other things, that it doubles itself, so to speak, and develops in two directions.[27]

This analysis, with its emphasis on the original immediacy and unity of an experience, its employment of the neutral "phenomenon" language, and its explication of subject/object duality through a doubling up in relation to other things, anticipates to no mean degree of detail James's 1904 analysis of direct acquaintance, and his metaphysical interpretation of the thesis of pure experience. In the passage that immediately follows, his prose evokes his later analysis of reference and knowledge about, claiming that conceptual states of mind seem inherently to refer beyond themselves, and, unlike the sensation of color, are not self-sufficient.[28] James also anticipates his infamous reduction of Kant's transcendental "I think" to the sensation of breathing in the conclusion of "Does Consciousness Exist?" "Whenever I try to become sensible of my thinking activity as such," he writes, "what I catch is some bodily fact, an impression coming from my brow, or head, or throat, or nose."[29] In contrast to his strong rhetoric in the later writings, in the *Briefer Course* epilogue he does not appear terribly confident of the philosophical ideas he is suggesting. Instead, he humbly comments that "the relations of the knower and the known are infinitely complicated, and . . . a

[26] It is important to note that James has no intention of jettisoning all of his work – particularly the careful observations of abnormal psychological states and psychical facts as phenomena. These are the data for which psychology must account and with which it must work. As a compendium of phenomena, and even a series of analyses thereof, *Principles* in particular has much to offer. The aggregate hypothesis that James sought to buttress, however, at this point seems utterly inadequate.

[27] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 398. [28] Ibid., p. 399. [29] Ibid., p. 400.

genial, whole-hearted, popular-science way of formulating them will not suffice."[30]

James's overall conclusion to this particularly frank self-exposure in the epilogue to *Briefer Course* is forthright. Asking what all of this implies for psychology as a natural science, he confesses:

> it means a psychology particularly fragile, and into which the waters of metaphysical criticism leak at every joint, a psychology all of whose elementary assumptions and data must be reconsidered in wider connections and translated into other terms . . . This is no science, it is only the hope of a science . . . The Galileo and the Lavoisier of psychology will be famous men indeed when they come . . . When they do come, however, the necessities of the case will make them "metaphysical." Meanwhile the best way in which we can facilitate their advent is to understand how great is the darkness in which we grope, and never to forget that the natural-science assumptions with which we started are provisional and revisable things.[31]

We have seen that the epilogue of *Briefer Course*, like the concluding chapter of *Principles*, is most concerned with the psychology of the associationists, who argue from atomistic premises. Yet while *Principles* is occupied with debates *within* psychology, ending on a humble note with regard to progress in psychology to date, in the epilogue to *Briefer Course* James puts the ball squarely in the court of metaphysics (philosophy), staking the future of psychology on the success of those investigations. Psychology may well be able to be approached as a natural science, but that does not imply that the assumptions of the natural sciences generally are either clear or unproblematic. Given psychology's additional failure to land any *practical* laws like those of thermodynamics, the situation James indicates is all the more critical.

JAMES'S SHIFTING INTEREST: FROM PSYCHOLOGY INTO METAPHYSICS

Public reputations and acclaim tend to lag behind actual work and production. This is certainly true in the case of James. Although he was not named Professor of Psychology at Harvard until 1889, his work in psychology really began in earnest in the latter half of the 1870s with his first course offerings on the subject in 1875–6 and the tendering of his contract for *Principles* in 1878.[32] While growing through

[30] Ibid., p. 399. [31] Ibid., pp. 400–1.

[32] See Skrupskelis's introduction to James, *Manuscript Lectures*, for the chronology of James's teaching career.

the 1880s with the publication of several important articles in *Mind*, James's reputation in psychology was not fully established until after the publication of *Principles* in 1890.[33] Shortly thereafter, however, and certainly by the time of the completion of *Psychology: Briefer Course* in 1892, James had turned his primary intellectual sights back to philosophy – or as he often called it, metaphysics.

In addition to the evidence in *Briefer Course* for the early date of James's turn to metaphysics, there is significant corroboration in his letters of 1891–5. In 1891 he wrote to Carl Stumpf that their psychological differences could only be resolved "on some *erkenntnistheoretische* basis, which will succeed in clearing up the relations between the 'state of mind' and its 'object.'" He goes on to tell Stumpf that he has aspirations to write on this subject, presenting a rough prototype of one central idea of his radical empiricism – namely, that the data of experience are treated sometimes as things, at other times as representations.[34]

James also indicated his preference for philosophy to Théodore Flournoy in 1892, indicating that he "always felt that the occupation of philosophizing was with [him] a valid excuse for neglecting laboratory work, since there is not time for both."[35] James's desire to leave behind the psychological laboratory crystallized in his successful effort to bring Hugo Münsterberg to Harvard in 1892 specifically in psychology, so that James might be free to pursue more philosophical interests.[36] Unfortunately, Münsterberg was not well, and James was left to work in psychology for longer than he had hoped. In 1895 James wrote to Stumpf that he wished "to get relieved of psychology as soon as possible, but [that he was] trying at present to keep Münsterberg's nest warm for him ere his return."[37] The following year, again to Stumpf, James

[33] The most important of these articles, "What is an Emotion?," appeared in *Mind* in 1884. In that article James introduces what becomes known as the James–Lange theory of emotion – that "bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur *is* the emotion." See William James, "What is an Emotion?," *Essays in Psychology*, *The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 170.

[34] See the letter from James to Stumpf, 21 September 1891, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 175. Interestingly, at this point James claims to offer no "ontological theory" of knowledge, but rather only an analysis. Although he occasionally takes refuge in a seemingly naive view of analysis (e.g., his claim in "The Function of Cognition" to be doing only "descriptive psychology"), what he seems to mean here is that he wants a metaphysical position without an ontological commitment to either materialism or idealism (spiritualism). See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 14.

[35] James to Théodore Flournoy, 19 September 1892, *Letters of William James*, vol. I, p. 325.

[36] See the letter from James to Henry James, 11 April 1892, *Letters of William James*, vol. I, pp. 317–18.

[37] James to Carl Stumpf, 18 December 1895, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 190.

explicitly bid psychology goodbye for the present, turning to more "speculative directions."[38]

This textual and epistolary interpretation of James's immanent and early interest in metaphysics is also borne out by close attention to his teaching and publication record in the 1890s. The watershed year from the perspective of his later philosophical and metaphysical writings is 1895. In that year he published "The Knowing of Things Together" (actually given as an address in December 1894) and taught "Philosophy 20b: Psychological Seminary – The Feelings," the notes of which are extant. These documents manifest a strong link between James's views on psychology and what he calls metaphysics. Further, both texts demonstrate notable development in his thought along metaphysical lines, drawing on material from *Briefer Course* and prefiguring substantively and significantly his later-announced philosophical position of radical empiricism.

"THE KNOWING OF THINGS TOGETHER": THE FORMAL BREAK WITH DUALISM

"The Knowing of Things Together" was composed as James's President's Address to the American Psychological Association and was delivered in December 1894. It appeared in the *Psychological Review* in March 1895. The piece was apparently written in a short period of time, since less than a month before the address, James wrote to J. Mark Baldwin that he had not yet written a line.[39] Not surprisingly, the essay is somewhat unbalanced, offering passages of lucid philosophical insight and analysis conjoined to sections that are mere catalogs of then current psychological positions. The text is particularly significant, however, for two reasons: first, it overtly rejects certain crucial presuppositions of *The Principles of Psychology* (and by extension, *Psychology: Briefer Course*); and second, it publicly presents several elementary features of James's subsequently named "radical empiricism."

James focused the address on a subject that had plagued his conscience in the epilogue to *Briefer Course* and continued to vex him throughout his career: the problem of how thoughts combine, or, as he puts it

[38] James to Stumpf, 24–8 November 1896, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 190.

[39] James to J. Mark Baldwin, 1 December 1894, Papers of William James, bMS Am 1092.1 (typed copy), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, excerpted in "The Text of *Essays in Philosophy*," James, *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 254.

here, how things can be known together.[40] As I have argued, James's interest in this question is symptomatic of his dissatisfaction with what he here calls the "natural and easy" solution of the associationist psychologists (also called "common sense" and "commonplace psychology.")[41] On this dominant view, mental states such as the experience of the taste of lemonade are interpreted as aggregates, and thoughts or ideas are flatly described as simply combining to produce these aggregate states. But just to adopt this view, James objects, is "already to foist in a theory about the phenomenon. Not so should a question be approached." The phenomenon taken as it comes (in experience) is of actually knowing things *together*, not of discrete ideas combining (of which we have no experience). It is thus in accord with the terms of the phenomenalistic description, he contends, that a philosophical solution must be sought.[42]

This opening to James's treatment of the problem of the synthetic unity of states of consciousness seems to indicate that he intends to take on associationist psychology once again, presumably in defense of his view published in *Principles* and *Briefer Course*. What is interesting about the talk, however, is that he actually criticizes his own view more than that of the associationists, jettisoning two of the principal assumptions of his position, and granting a major concession to the other side. The concession accorded nonetheless comes, I shall argue, at no mean cost to associationist psychology.

James had begun *Principles* with a clear separation of psychology as a natural science from the enterprise of metaphysics, arguing that psychology can go no further *as a natural science* than the mere correlation of thoughts and feelings with their physical conditions. "If she goes farther," he writes, "she becomes metaphysical. All attempts to *explain* our phenomenally given thoughts as products of deeper-lying entities . . . are metaphysical."[43] In this passage one can see the distinguishing feature of James's natural-science perspective on psychology, namely, its predilection for *description* rather than explanation. Involving a self-restriction to the mere *correlation* of particular instances of two observable kinds of phenomena (brain states and mental states), James's view does not

[40] See the discussion of *A Pluralistic Universe* in chapter 4 for the centrality of this issue to James's final panpsychist position.

[41] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 397; James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 72.

[42] James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 72.

[43] James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 6.

permit the psychologist to explain the actual "how" of this connection that he or she observes. This "positivistic" aspect of his psychology, James writes in 1890, is perhaps its only original feature.[44]

James does not actually believe in 1890 that this approach to psychology is free of assumption; however, he does mean to restrict his assumptions in *Principles* almost exclusively to those shared by other natural sciences: the presupposition of a basic mind/matter dualism, and the rather obvious presumption of the existence of the object of study – in this case thoughts, a physical world, and knowing as the connection between them. The only further assumption of particular consequence that James's natural-science psychology makes is its presumption that states of mind are themselves unitary phenomena.[45]

Both of James's psychology texts are attacks on associationist psychology, as is "The Knowing of Things Together." Thus it is rather surprising at the end of James's Presidential Address of 1894, replete with all of its criticism of associationist thought, to find him overtly rejecting three of his own presuppositions: namely, his separation of psychology from metaphysics, his preference for description over explanation, and his presumption of the unity of the mental state. James's rejection of these assumptions does not derive from an assessment of their failure to produce valid psychological observation. On the contrary, he writes, "My intention was a good one, and a natural science infinitely more complete than the psychologies we now possess could be written without abandoning its terms."[46] James's change of heart is instead justified by two observations, one pertaining to the intertwined nature of science and philosophy, and the other concerning the empirical adequacy of the "singular mental state" thesis. First, however *productive* the natural-science endeavor might be, its artificial quarantine of metaphysics and epistemology cannot be upheld in the actual practice of such a science. "No conventional restrictions *can* keep metaphysical and so-called epistemological inquiries out of the psychology books," he writes, thus lifting the sanction because it is a practically useless fiction.[47] Second, while the "unique mental entity" assumption provides non-contradictory descriptions of phenomena in contrast to those of

[44] Ibid., p. 6. One could argue easily, I think, that in *Briefer Course* James has already abandoned this minimal task, if not already in the text of *Principles*. Compare *Briefer Course*, pp. 10–13, for James's metaphysical refinements on the possibility of descriptive versus rational psychology, and p. 331, where James delves into causal explanations of emotion. The principal point is that James took his basic project to be limited, even if he did not always stay within its bounds.

[45] James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 6.

[46] James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 88.

[47] Ibid., p. 88.

other approaches, James avers that the concomitant proposal to differentiate mental states according to cognitive function "leads to a somewhat strained way of talking of dreams and reveries, and to quite an unnatural way of talking of some emotional states." He thus admits his willingness to consider "that mental contents should be called complex, just as their objects are, and this even in psychology."[48]

The interesting thing about James's recantation here, both of the separation of psychology and metaphysics and of the simplicity of the mental state, is that he bases his decision in each case on *empirical* observation. On the one hand he attends to the practice of writing psychology (or thinking psychologically), while on the other he bases his assessment on the particular contents observed through gathering psychological data about which to write. James's shift, then, can be said to be driven by a more thoroughgoing empirical attitude than he had previously manifested, a more earnest attention to phenomena *as they are given*. A "radical" empiricism, which calls into question even the well-worn assumptions of the self-sufficiency of the natural sciences, is therefore precisely what he has in mind here. Turning back to the beginning of "The Knowing of Things Together," one can conclude that his criticisms do not stop at his own doorstep but rather reach well into general metaphysical issues as basic as the natural-science presupposition of mind/matter dualism.

In chapter 1, I presented a seven-point analysis of James's radically empiricist *Weltanschauung*, breaking down its components into manifestly distinguishable, if not always independent, doctrines or positions. In the second section of "The Knowing of Things Together," comprising a mere six pages, James overtly demonstrates his commitment to the first five of these seven components, leaving aside only pragmatism as a conception of truth and the pluralistic conception of panpsychism. Section II of the article purports to be a fresh analysis of what we mean by the phrase "the knowing of things together," and a fresh analysis indeed it is. The section is composed of consecutive reflections on three questions: What do we mean by "things"? What do we mean by saying that we "know" them? and, What is the mystery of presence in absence?

Under the first question concerning things, James invokes the traditions of both idealism and empiricism, staking out a metaphysical monism analogous to his later pure experience thesis, as well as starkly stating a version of the methodological thesis of radical empiricism:

[48] Ibid., p. 88.

For the philosophy that began with Berkeley, and has led in our tongue to Shadworth Hodgson, things have no other nature than thoughts have, and we know of no things that are not given to somebody's experience. When I see the thing white paper before my eyes, the nature of the thing and the nature of my sensations are one . . . it may appear very differently at different times; but whatever it be, the stuff of which it is made is thought-stuff.[49]

James's presentation of the thesis of pure experience here is, doubtless, unsophisticated relative to his later work, in that it ignores both the question of what "thought-stuff" is and the issue of whether the monism he is endorsing is substantive or merely formal. The statement of it here is, nonetheless, a definite rejection of any fundamental mind/matter dualism, including the psycho-physical thesis which had undergirded all of his previous psychological writings.

In this passage we can also observe the close connection of James's particular understanding of empiricism to his monistic metaphysical leanings. His strict empirical restriction to experience leads inexorably to the conclusion that things cannot be presumed to be radically different in any meaningful metaphysical sense from thoughts. Since we have no access to things except through thought, "radical" empiricism requires that we conclude at a minimum that things are made up of thought-stuff, whatever further analysis might find thought-stuff to be. James writes:

Even if with science we supposed a molecular architecture beneath the smooth whiteness of the paper, that architecture itself could only be defined as the stuff of a farther possible experience, a vision, say, of certain vibrating particles with which our acquaintance with the paper would terminate if it were prolonged by magnifying artifices not yet known.[50]

The methodological thesis of radical empiricism – the restriction of knowing (or philosophy) to things given to someone's experience – thus impinges on and even dictates the metaphysical monism that James here adopts. Although both of these positions are nuanced and more fully specified over time, the logical priority of experience, as well as the basic empirical/monistic flavor of it, remain in essence to the end of his life.

Having staked out more philosophical turf in one paragraph than he had in all of his writings on psychology, James moves immediately in his address to the problem of knowing. This three-page treatment is

[49] Ibid., p. 72. [50] Ibid., pp. 72–3.

organized around the now familiar knowledge about/direct acquaintance split that James articulates in virtually all of his considerations of the subject. Interestingly, where the preceding discussion was marginally unsophisticated from the perspective of 1904, James appears to have remained satisfied with his discussion of the problem of knowing here since he refers to it in "A World of Pure Experience" in 1904 and reprints the excerpt unchanged (except for a footnote) in 1909 as "The Tigers in India" in *The Meaning of Truth*.[51]

James begins with the case of someone claiming conceptual knowledge of tigers in India. Raising the "pragmatic" question of what our claims to know a distant object can be known-as, he suggests that in such an instance we mean to indicate a sort of "presence in absence," one that at a minimum must be known as a kind of "pointing."[52] In 1894 he writes:

> The pointing of our thought to the tigers is known simply and solely as a procession of mental associates and motor consequences that follow on the thought, and that would lead harmoniously, if followed out, into some ideal or real context, or even into the immediate presence, of the tigers.[53]

James's overt interest in offering this analysis is to set aside the mysterious renderings of conceptual knowing as a self-transcendent presence in absence – or even worse, as "intentionality" – that dominate epistemological writers of his day. Instead, he prefers to understand knowing as involving concrete, experienced relations. "In all of this," he writes:

> there is no self-transcendency in our mental images taken by themselves. They are one physical fact; the tigers are another; and their pointing to the tigers is a perfectly commonplace physical relation, if you once grant a connecting world to be there.[54]

While it is obvious that this analysis is similar to that of the 1904 presentation, there is, nonetheless, a significant leaning here on physicality. James even goes so far as to treat "mental images" as physical facts, a phrasing that raises some problems for my argument that James in 1894 is already interested in presenting a monistic metaphysics logically prior to the mind/matter split. How, then, are we to interpret his claims here?

51 See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 36. See also "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 28.

52 James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 73. This pointing, as it turns out, is precisely the sort of leading James later articulates in "A World of Pure Experience."

53 James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 74.

54 Ibid., p. 74.

There is no fully satisfying answer to this problem, particularly if one assumes that James is consistent in this text. The most plausible interpretation, I think, is that he has slipped up in his presentation when he privileges the physical over the mental. The caveat he adds in the footnote to the 1909 excerpt ("The Tigers in India") is an oblique admission of this mistake by James himself. "The reader will observe," he comments, "that the text is written from the point of view of naif realism or common sense, and avoids raising the idealistic controversy."[55] Given the alliances James makes with idealism in 1894 on the page preceding the excerpt, the 1909 claim to avoid the idealistic controversy is not particularly credible (though it does make sense when the excerpt stands alone). James's mistake here is slightly more complicated, then, and must be explained by recourse to something more than "naif realism," since James is clearly anything but naive in this 1894 address.

Close attention to the passage reveals a clue to James's misdirection, one which provides a means to a plausible explanation of his odd reliance on physicality. He is attempting to explicate pointing while avoiding the need to posit a self-transcendency *within* thoughts, or "mental images," themselves. His approach is, on the one hand, to treat both the thoughts and the tigers as fully independent of one another, and on the other, to articulate a processual or functional leading through independent associates between them. In short, he postulates a set of *external relations* that just in fact do hold among the parts in question (insofar as the knowing is true), in opposition to the *internal* character of self-transcendency supposed by his colleagues. "The ideas and the tigers are in themselves as loose and separate, to use Hume's language, as any two things can be," he writes, "and pointing means here an operation as external and adventitious as any that nature yields."[56]

In the very next line, James reformulates this explicitly without the physical bias, writing that "in representative knowledge there is no special inner mystery, but only an outer chain of physical or mental intermediaries connecting thought and thing."[57] James's attention, it seems, was initially caught by the necessity both of articulating relations as external and of treating thoughts, things, and relations on the same level metaphysically. This interest itself can be understood as an early formulation of the factual thesis of radical empiricism, concerning the reality of relations. The fact that James momentarily prioritizes the

[55] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 36.
[56] James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 74. [57] Ibid., p. 74.

physical as the fundamental order thus may be interpreted either as a rhetorical gesture toward his materialist contemporaries or as a slip into his own longstanding psycho-physical habits. It could not, however, be seen as a philosophically important move, except insofar as externality were limited to the physical order. James's complex treatments of space and the spatiality of thought in his psychology texts, not to mention his subsequent writings, render this latter explanation highly implausible.[58]

James's interest in the externality of thoughts and things to one another exemplifies the empiricist character of his "mosaic" radical empiricism: it emphasizes parts as prior to wholes, and explains wholes by their parts. More importantly, the emphasis on externality also funds the factual claim of radical empiricism concerning the reality of both conjunctive and disjunctive relations. In a sense, the whole approach of "The Knowing of Things Together" – its departure from the phenomenon of things known *together* – testifies to James's interest in the givenness of relations, particularly conjunctive relations. He develops this idea differently in the talk when (also in discussing presence in absence) he explicitly treats the "pulse of experience" as the basic metaphysical unit:

> Inside of the minimum pulse of experience which, taken as object, is change of feeling, and, taken as content, is feeling of change, is realized the absolute and essential self-transcendency . . . *Here in the elementary datum of which both our physical and our mental worlds are built, we find included both the original of presence in absence and the prototype of that operation of knowing many things together which it is our business to discuss* . . . What is given is pooled and mutual; there is no dark spot, no point of ignorance; no one fraction is eclipsed from any other's point of view.[59]

James is asserting that the continuity of things being known together is itself given factually in experience. This is a case of a "unity in manyness," as James puts it, wherein relations are given internally to a particular experience, as well as both given and posited externally among various experiences. Further, here we see James presage explicitly his thesis of pure experience by treating the "pulse of experience" as the "elementary datum" out of which our physical and mental worlds are built. Experience is prior to the mind/matter split, and it is

[58] See James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pp. 303–4; *Principles of Psychology*, p. 779 (for the spatiality of thoughts) and all of chapter 20. See also "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 41, for the common sharing of space by various minds.

[59] James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, pp. 77–8.

through *external* relations among these pulses that the physical and mental worlds are constituted.

The remaining feature from the 1904 presentation that James previews in his 1894 address is his analysis of direct acquaintance, immediate knowing:

> There is no "presence in absence" here, and no "pointing," but rather an all-round embracing of the paper by the thought . . . Dotted all through our experience are states of immediate acquaintance just like this. Somewhere our belief always does rest on ultimate data like the whiteness, smoothness, or squareness of this paper.[60]

This phenomenological account of the experiential ultimacy of immediate acquaintance is followed by a characteristic observation of the potentially provisional character of such states. James's treatment in 1894 is, then, analogous in both senses (its experiential ultimacy and provisional character) to his claim in 1904 that "the immediate experience in its passing is always 'truth,' practical truth, *something to act on*."[61]

Also typically of the later presentation, James does not content himself here with a phenomenological account of direct acquaintance; rather, he also offers an account from the wider view, a more metaphysical account, drawing directly (if perhaps unknowingly) on one of Kant's uses of "pure" (discussed in chapter 1):

> If our own private vision be considered in abstraction from every other event, as if it constituted by itself the universe . . . then the paper seen and the seeing of it are only two names for one indivisible fact which, properly named, is *the datum, the phenomenon, or the experience*. The paper is in the mind and the mind is around the paper, because paper and mind are only two names that are given later to the one experience, when, taken in a larger world of which it forms a part, its connections are traced in different directions. *To know immediately, then, or intuitively, is for mental content and object to be identical.*[62]

In this brief passage James brings together the methodological, factual, metaphysical, and functional theses of radical empiricism as they are later articulated, focusing on experience collectively as the field of inquiry, treating relations as given within it, taking discrete experience as the fundamental metaphysical unit, and articulating knowing as a function that happens within it. The only elements wholly missing from this speech are pragmatism taken as a description of truth, and any consideration of the panpsychic problem of co-consciousness and experiential

[60] Ibid., p. 75. [61] James, "Does Consciousness Exist?," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 13.
[62] James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, pp. 75–6.

autonomy that vexes James in his later writings. Not only is "The Knowing of Things Together" noteworthy, then, for its overt disavowal of the presuppositions of *The Principles of Psychology*; it is also exemplary for its public *presentation* of a new, albeit unnamed, metaphysical view. James's self-deprecating remonstration to have "gossiped to while away this unlucky presidential hour" must be read as a rhetorical flourish.[63]

PURE EXPERIENCE, THE FIELD THEORY, AND THE 1895–6 SEMINAR "THE FEELINGS"

James's teaching record in the first half of the 1890s manifests a gradual shift in focus from psychological issues and methods to philosophy and metaphysics.[64] In the 1895–6 academic year that followed the Presidential Address, James's psychology seminar ("Philosophy 20b: Psychological Seminary – The Feelings") concentrated directly on issues related to the metaphysical underpinnings of psychology, rather than taking up the "correlation" question James previously had kept in view. This turn from description to explanation is signaled in the very first lines of the comprehensive notes for his presentations that remain:

> The man living in a certain train of experience finds it e.g. painful – The painfulness seems to flow by inner logic from the nature of the experience . . . In all this we are considering what determines the pain's *nature*.
>
> But now another question arises. By what means is the man enabled to have the pain at all as a matter of fact? This is different from the question why, supposing a man to have a feeling, the latter ought to have the pain-character. We ask now why as a matter of fact the man feels at all – a question not of essence but of cause.[65]

The whole question of the nature of a feeling is, James thinks, a question of taxonomy among mental states taken in themselves, a question of "essence," a question of descriptive psychology. The proper question of cause, however, is one which James had explicitly set aside in his earlier psychological discussions, classing it as irrelevant or at best ambivalent for the purposes of the enterprise.[66] Here in fall 1895, James remains true to his avowal of the previous December no longer

[63] Ibid., p. 86.

[64] For a helpful discussion of James's teaching record, see Skrupskelis's introduction to James, *Manuscript Lectures*, pp. xvii–lxiii.

[65] James, "Notes for Philosophy 20b: Psychological Seminary – The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 212.

[66] See, e.g., James's ambivalence toward the issue of material determinism in *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pp. 13, 395.

to separate psychology and metaphysics. Accordingly, his psychology seminar is all about metaphysics and epistemology, never actually returning to the descriptive issue of a determinate feeling such as pain.

What James does do in the course is pursue a "description" of a different sort, one of the process of experience "in its simplest terms with the fewest assumptions."[67] For James this means: (1) restricting himself exclusively to the terms of experience; (2) articulating a dynamic monism (assuming an "integral datum") in place of the normal dualistic ontology; (3) providing for the reality of relations among the elements in the system; and thus (4) providing a dynamic account both of knowing and of the emergence of the subject/object, thought/thing distinctions within thought.[68] Without going into further detail, we can already conclude that James is here pursuing the methodological, factual, metaphysical, and (both) functional theses of radical empiricism, much as he had in "The Knowing of Things Together." This complex of views, then, should be seen to have tightened its hold on James's reflections by 1895, rather than haphazardly emerging at a later date.

In addition to the evidence supporting my general argument about the early development of radical empiricism, the notes for "The Feelings" are particularly interesting for certain turns of argument. Noteworthy for the broader purposes of this book are: (1) the first appearance of the term "pure experience" in the Jamesian corpus, and the relation of that usage to the work of Richard Avenarius; and (2) James's novel suggestion of the "field" metaphor as the basic metaphysical unit of his emerging view, and his pursuant analysis of objectivity. The point about "pure experience" is generally important for dating and understanding James's developing radically empiricist *Weltanschauung*. The field-theory analysis is crucial to the reinterpretation of *Varieties* that constitutes chapter 3, as well as central to understanding both James's growing preference for panpsychism and his broader argument against transcendental monism in *A Pluralistic Universe* (the subject of chapter 4).

Pure experience and Richard Avenarius

The phrase "pure experience" occurs only once in the body of the notes for "The Feelings." The extant pages of the notebook begin with

[67] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 228.

[68] See ibid., p. 228, for the conclusions James draws from his inquiries in the course. Earlier in the notes he explicitly refers to the general monistic thesis, mentioning "Our assumption of integral datum" and asserting "There *is* no stuff anywhere but data." See pp. 216, 219.

the two paragraphs quoted above, which are immediately followed by a catalog of six "Possible meaning[s] of the Self." Next there is a list of some twenty different philosophers and works, and then a series of "Questions" for the course, ranging from the nature of the thinker, to "the Phenomenist view," to the nature of knowledge and free will. James then turns to what appears to be a brief overview of phenomenism, in which we find the locution " 'pure' experience":

> All our terms are suggestive of 2 aspects. Datum, phenomenon, experience, vorfindung or vorgefundenes (Avenarius), object, content.
>
> On the phenomenist view the *objects* are separate, the system is in the tho't. The thought is the systematic way of taking them, the thing the separate way. But it is *more* or *less* systematic. Apperception & mind stuff come in there. The ground of synthesis, what is it?
>
> First the phenomenon the datum "pure" experience which we find that common sense has already dirempted.[69]

Phenomenism (or phenomenalism), taken generally, is the view that phenomena as experienced or sensed are themselves the components that make up reality, as opposed to the view that phenomena are somehow appearances or copies of things in themselves, which alone are real.[70] The most overt proponent of a view akin to phenomenism in James's list of philosophers in "The Feelings" is the German philosopher Richard Avenarius, who is also the only person mentioned again in James's description of phenomenism. Avenarius made his mark with a two-volume work, *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung* (Critique of Pure Experience), published in 1888–90. In 1895 James owned a copy of that work, as well as two other books by Avenarius.[71]

The locution "pure experience" in Avenarius's work appears to be original, playing on Kant's notion of pure reason, as well as his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. James's presentation of pure experience in 1895–6

[69] Ibid., p. 213. This appears to be James's first use of the phrase "pure experience" in any of his extant writings. See note 73 below for more on *vorgefundenes* and Avenarius.

[70] James writes positively about phenomenism as early as 1875 in the brief notice of Chauncey Wright's death penned for the *Nation*. See *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, pp. 15–17, as well as James's 1876 review of Bain and Renouvier, *Essays, Comments, and Reviews*, pp. 321–6. Ford makes a point of characterizing James's phenomenism as inherently at odds with panpsychism, and thus attempts to distinguish when James is a panpsychist from when he is a phenomenist. I argue in chapters 1 and 4 that James's panpsychism is compatible with a phenomenistic rendering of radical empiricism (presented in chapter 1), and that pluralistic panpsychism is, in fact, an extension and further clarification of radical empiricism. See Ford, *William James's Philosophy*, pp. 76–82.

[71] See editor's note 213.5 to James, *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 498.

can be seen to be in part opportunistic, and in part intellectually continuous with Avenarius's work. The appropriation seems opportunistic on account of its context, given the similarity of that context to earlier usages by James.[72] In the 1895–6 passage quoted above Avenarius's name occurs as an attribution for the terms *Vorfindung* and *Vorgefundenes*, which are penned immediately after "Datum, phenomenon, experience."[73] The actual phrase "'pure' experience" occurs in a modulated refrain six sentences later: "First the phenomenon the datum the 'pure' experience." *Vorfindung* and *Vorgefundenes* have by now dropped out, but Avenarius's "pure" appears as a modifier for the previously autonomous "experience." Moreover, both the quotation marks around "pure" and the lack of a recurrence of the phrase within that particular notebook elicit questions about the degree to which James feels comfortable with – or for that matter, even author of – the locution. By contrast, in his 1897 notes for "Philosophy 20b: The Philosophical Problems of Psychology," James uses the locution "pure experience" (without quotation marks) freely and frequently to characterize both his own position and its basic unit.[74] Also reinforcing the idea of an opportunistic borrowing from Avenarius is James's marginal note to a notebook containing outlines and titles for his Gifford Lectures of 1901–2. He begins a note "A propos of my *reine erfahrung*!," using the German for "pure experience" directly, although he apparently had never written of pure experience in that language.[75]

Although there seems to be reasonable evidence that James's term "pure experience" derives at least nominally from Avenarius, the 1895–6

[72] In 1894 James wrote (phenomenistically, one should add) of "one indivisible fact which, properly named, is *the datum, the phenomenon, or the experience*." His 1895–6 notebook reads: "First the phenomenon the datum 'pure' experience." See James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 75.

[73] *Vorfindung* and *Vorgefundenes* (Avenarius himself uses *das Vorgefundene)* are formulations from the relatively uncommon *vorfinden*, to find. They indicate for Avenarius the pure (negatively determined) state of a feeling taken in itself, in contrast to its treatment within the system of thought. These terms also resonate with *empfinden* (to feel) and *Empfindung* (feeling), as well as Kant's *vorstellen* (to represent) and *Vorstellung* (representation). See Richard Avenarius, *Kritik der reinen Erfahrung*, reprint, 2 vols. (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1907), vol. II, p. 354.

[74] See, e.g., James, "Notes for Philosophy 20b: Psychological Seminary – The Philosophical Problems of Psychology (1897–1898)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 237, where he writes "Let us try then a new departure and see if any better results come from the analysis of pure experience – call it for short: THE PHENOMENISTIC VIEW." The cover of the notebook containing these course notes reads (in James's hand) "Book II: The Self – Pure Experience, etc.," apparently following directly on the notebook for "The Feelings," whose cover reads "Book I."

[75] James was, of course, fluent in German, so this piece of evidence should not be interpreted to be overwhelming. The notebook is bMS Am 1092.9 (4509) and is transcribed as "Appendix IV" in James, *Varieties*, p. 497.

notebook for "The Feelings" does not indicate much about how James viewed Avenarius's thought. The appearances of his name in that text, for example, never coincide with an overt estimation of his views. James does, however, mention Avenarius in these notes either as a possible way out of certain problems or for support in his analysis of them.[76] By contrast, the 1897–8 seminar on "The Philosophical Problems of Psychology" appears to take Avenarius's work much more seriously and substantively, explicating the systematic implications of Avenarius's rendering of pure experience and discussing his metaphysical model explicitly.[77] While James's estimation of Avenarius's view is again not explicit, the context indicates that James viewed his own approach as developing significantly different problems. Thus after a paragraph on Avenarius's interpretation of experience and dualism, James writes, "But for me the problem still is this: To describe all that occurs without ontological dualism between the *that* as object, & the that as 'subjective' 'content.'"[78] Clearly, by 1897 James does not take Avenarius's solution to alleviate his particular concerns.

James's estimation of Avenarius in both of these sets of notes cannot be said to be anything other than collegial and favorable. Interestingly, however, the principal intellectual opinion of Avenarius penned by James dates from a decade later, and takes a very negative – even dismissive – view of the philosopher's work. On 31 January 1908 James wrote to Norman Kemp Smith:

> I have only just "got round" to your singularly solid and compact study of Avenarius in *Mind*. I find it clear and very clarifying, after the innumerable hours I have spent in trying to dishevel him. I have read the *Weltbegriff* three times, and have half expected to read both books over again [the two-volume *Kritik*] to assimilate his immortal message to man, of which I have hitherto been able to make nothing. You set me free! I shall not re-read him! but leave him to his spiritual dryness and preposterous pedantry.[79]

[76] Avenarius's name is mentioned without content twice. The four other mentions of Avenarius are more positive than not, in the sense that James turns to his analyses for support or assistance in working through a problem. See James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 213 (discussed just above), pp. 223, 225–6. For the mere mentions, see pp. 213 and 218.

[77] Avenarius's *Kritik* pursues a biological (or psycho-physical) dynamic of interaction as an explanation of cognition. The principal terms are the central nervous system (system C), which is affected by changes in the environment (R values), experiences (E values), and metabolic changes (S values). James's engagement of Avenarius's text is thus rather obvious. See James, "Philosophical Problems of Psychology (1897–8)," *Manuscript Lectures*, pp. 242, 246n., 250n., and especially 253.

[78] James, "Philosophical Problems of Psychology (1897–8)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 254.

[79] James to Norman Kemp Smith, 31 January 1908, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 301.

James's objections to Avenarius's dryness and pedantry are characteristic of his aesthetic preferences in philosophy, but his claims to have made nothing of the thinker seem overstated in light of his notebooks. In addition to the "pure experience" overlap, James and Avenarius share a general preference for philosophical parsimony, as well as a more specific methodological restriction to the terms of experience. If all of this is taken into account, it appears more than just likely that his engagement with Avenarius's work contributed meaningfully to the development of his thought in the 1890s. There is, however, no doubt that James's rendering of pure experience is substantively his own.

The field theory

The second and perhaps more important point of interest in the 1895–6 lecture notes on "The Feelings" is James's innovation and development of the field metaphor presented there. The field theory is best known for its appearance in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where it serves as an explanation for the phenomenon of conversion.[80] It is generally assumed to come directly out of *The Principles of Psychology* and *Psychology: Briefer Course*.[81] Although the notions of a "stream" and "fringe" to thought or consciousness are found in both of those texts, the metaphor of a field and the corresponding notion of the margin were apparently introduced by James during the process of teaching the 1895–6 course on "The Feelings."[82] Interestingly, in contrast to the single occurrence of the analogous term "pure experience," the field trope dominates his extant notes for the course.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of James's course was to explore the viability of the integral datum, phenomenon, or experience taken as a metaphysical unit. Thus as the notes progress, he returns again and again to similar basic formulations: "Object-stuff and tho't-stuff are the

[80] See James, *Varieties*, lectures 9–10.

[81] For a straightforward example of the assumption of continuity of the field theory with *The Principles of Psychology*, see Henry S. Levinson, *The Religious Investigations of William James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), pp. 115–16. Wild's interpretation on this point is even more striking. Wild directly misquotes James's chapter "The Stream of Thought," arguing that James sees the directionality of our thought as "the 'field view of consciousness.'" James's text reads "This field of view of consciousness," and is simply akin to his notion of the fringe which he develops within two pages in the text. See Wild, *Radical Empiricism of William James*, p. 69; and James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 247.

[82] For the "fringe," see James, *Principles of Psychology*, pp. 249, 446; and *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 149. The field metaphor also appears in the notes for James's "Lowell Lectures on Exceptional Mental States," given in the fall of 1896. See James, *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 64.

same in whatness"; "[Recall our] assumption of [an] integral datum"; and "There *is* no stuff anywhere but data."[83] Immediately after the first of these formulations, James invokes the metaphor of the "stream," which was central to his efforts to account for the continuity of thought without a substantive soul (or transcendental ego) in *Principles*. In 1895–6 he writes similarly: "But the *me-s* are shed off into their own string or stream. 'Shed off' by whom? By the next datum." Shortly thereafter, he continues, attempting to explain the emergence of dual systems of associates:

> The datum is part of a stream, is immediately continued, becomes determined & qualified by what follows – that also becomes connected with it retrospectively, and (as things turn out) experience shells apart into two great series or lines of connexion the data as such or "thises" and the predicates or whatnesses attached to them. These latter form a system of permanents spread out & "describable." The former not describable.[84]

Interestingly, in this passage the two systems of associates connected through the stream are *not* thoughts and things. Instead, on the one hand there are discrete moments of "pure" experiencing – "thises," states of direct acquaintance, while on the other hand James describes referential experiences – "whatnesses," predicates constitutive of knowledge about that point to other moments of experience. James goes even further, associating these "whatnesses" with the object side of the subject/object distinction by calling them "permanents," and arraying them in space. Unfortunately for James, however, on this attempt objects turn out to be what is describable but not directly experienceable.

As one might surmise from the relative opacity of this passage, James's efforts in these notes are not thoroughly premeditated and systematic; rather, the notes exhibit a series of thought experiments apparently reflecting an actual thought process rather than designed for their rhetorical progression. Several pages later James returns to his starting point of the integral datum, trying again for a better outcome. This time he upholds his vow from "The Knowing of Things Together" to regard all states of mind as complex rather than singular (as in *Principles*). Instead of taking each simple element within the stream as the datum, thereby considering even connections of simultaneity as completely external to the basic element, James construes the datum more expansively:

[83] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, pp. 214, 216, 219. [84] Ibid., pp. 214–15.

> The entire world (obj. & subjective) at any actual time is a datum. [James's note: "The *whole* tho't world is identical with the *whole real world* . . ."] Only within that datum there are two parts, the ob. & the subjective parts, seen retrospectively; and as, within the datum, the one part is to the other, so will the datum itself in its entirety appear as the subjective part in the next datum.[85]

On this rendering the datum is a finite, temporal cross-section of the whole stream of data. As such, it is inclusive of both subjective and objective elements from the outset.

This formulation, taking the whole world at a given time as a datum, is the most extreme implication of James's basic idea that a single datum might in its complexity include both subjective and objective elements simultaneously. It is interesting in particular for its exhibition of what one might, on James's terms, call a "rationalistic" orientation, since the formulation moves from whole to parts rather than parts to whole. The idealism apparent in this particular experiment is, in fact, one of the basic insights that underlies his phenomenism, when taken along with the preference for parsimony evident in the methodological restriction to experience, data, or phenomena. Taking this cue from idealism (or monism) on this second attempt, James is able once again to beg the associationist's question of exactly how *continuity* happens, presuming rather than explaining the emergence of continuity. Instead, he can focus his explanatory efforts on the posterior dynamic of the subject/object *split*, which his first "stream" attempt in the course notes had so dismally managed. In this second departure, then, we can see another significant nod to the factual thesis of radical empiricism concerning the givenness of relations, continuity in particular.

In the very next paragraph, James simplifies this rather rich model by also assuming solipsism. This allows him to reduce the contents involved from the stream of *all* experiences in the world down to the stream of experience of an individual subject.[86] "The thing can be expressed solipsistically," he writes, "without altering any of the relations. Let the 'datum' be a *nunc stans* [a standing now]."[87] At this point he wrote in the left margin, "use the word 'field' here for 'datum' – it is conveniently ambiguous," introducing the term for the first time. The passage continues:

[85] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 219.

[86] Rhetorically, this strategy is also quite interesting, since it *begins* with one of the principal damning rejoinders of a then average philosophical critic (namely, that it ends in solipsism).

[87] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 220.

> Its content goes on increasing without its bulk changing, as the landscape seen from the back window of a RR. train might, if new marginal (or physical) matter kept pouring in whilst the older matter concentrically withdrew towards the centre filling a constant space that stood there to represent the subjective part. The original datum might be altogether objective in content. The next datum would have it shrunk into the subjective area, and would say that area represents or represented these (physical) facts.[88]

By rendering the stream of experience dynamically as a standing now, moving along in time as a train moves along a track, the datum or experience can be considered both statically and dynamically. When one considers the model statically, as a cross-section of the stream or a pulse of experience, one can focus on the variability of content within a given field, the concreteness of the particular experience, and even the givenness of relations within the field at a given time. By contrast, when one takes the standing now dynamically as the changing window or field, one can attend to the relations *among* fields and their contents, the changes and transitions within the field (qua *nunc stans*) over time, and the dynamics of relation that coincide with such changes. The static interpretation of the model thus elucidates "direct acquaintance," while the dynamic version fleshes out "knowledge about" (conceptual or intentional knowing).

The metaphor of the field is inherently spatial. This spatiality affords James a distinction that becomes crucial to his exploration of the subject/object distinction here, as well as critical to his account in *Varieties* – namely, the distinction between the center and the margins of any particular field taken by itself. In the passage quoted above, James invokes the spatial model of a field of vision, as seen when one is looking out of the back window of a train, in order to articulate the relations between objective and subjective contents over time. The objective elements are those that are spatially proximal to the train, literally ob-jected into – thrown in the way of – the field. The objective area thus includes those things just coming into view around the edges of the rear window. As the train moves, what has already been objectively introduced (objected) merges into the middle, making way for new objects at the margins. The center of the field remains the same "in size," but it is aggregative with regard to content, taking in each new objective content as the train moves along. The field (the view out of the rear window) at any given time is thus a cross-section of the stream

88 Ibid., p. 220.

of experience (the path of the train), subjectively representing a temporally extended portion of the stream in its center, while objectively manifesting the present, the standing now, just at its margins.

In addition to their differing locations of margin and center, there is a relevant empirical distinction between objective and subjective contents for James that has to do with how they manifest or "wear" a particular property or attribute. Objective contents "wear it [a particular property] outwardly," "adjectively," in the same way that a rock falling down the side of the hill strikes the train energetically as it enters the field from the margin. The attributes of subjective elements are, by contrast, "non-essential," or unenergetic. A subjective element "can coexist with what it could n't when vivid. It is transformable at will. It can violate all sorts of 'laws' which as objective it keeps."[89] Not altogether surprisingly, the train window metaphor begins breaking down if one pursues this too literally: strictly, as *visible* the rock would no longer be in position to strike the train; further, one cannot spatially manipulate the elements on the vanishing horizon. Nonetheless, James here retains the spatial associations of the center as the realm of the subjective and the margins as that of the objective that the metaphor suggests, conjoining them with the adjective/non-adjective distinction.

The notion of the margin, and its implicit connection to a "more" beyond the field from which elements come and to which they (once subjective) lead (or refer), is strikingly similar to James's characterization of the "fringe" in his psychology texts.[90] There the fringe involves what he calls a "halo of relations" around an image or object of thought, a set of "psychic overtones" not present to thought, but still creating expectations.[91] There is, however, a significant difference between the two accounts. In the psychological version James had explicitly restricted himself to discussing thoughts and feelings. The fringe there was, by extension, only a fringe "in the mind." In "The Feelings," by contrast, he is engaging in metaphysical speculation, attempting to account for both the subjective and objective as such, rather than just the subjective and objective among thoughts and feelings (while assuming there to *be* something else). Additionally, that which is in the fringe in the psychology texts does not possess its attributes adjectively; in fact, it barely possesses attributes at all. One strong analogy does hold between the two treatments nonetheless: both the fringe and the margin

89 Ibid., pp. 220–1. 90 For specific instances of the "more," see ibid., pp. 224, 229.
91 See, e.g., James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, pp. 149–51.

are areas of *actual* relations, conjunctive and disjunctive; correspondingly, both are the zones into which certain intentional contents of thought lead for their terminations.

Where the fringe metaphor in *Principles* was ambiguous concerning the objective or "external" world (nevertheless assumed), the dynamic transition of content from margin to center in the field metaphor provides James with the means to explore and articulate how objective reference actually functions:

> As the field alters and the older content shrivels, it forms connexion in its new subjective value with the new objective content that marginally comes in. *That* was an appearance of *this* from the earlier point of view. This is a predicate, then unknown, of that, this belongs with that, etc.[92]

Objective contents enter the field from the margins, displacing previous contents, while retaining concrete relations to the margins from which they have come. As they move into the field, they lose their vividness and concreteness, although certain characteristics of the contents remain. At the same time, however, the contents also acquire particular, new relations with other subjective contents that remain in the field. There is, then, absolutely no uncontextualized content within the field, since entering through the margins involves being determined by (being related to) the subjective contents of the field at the previous moment. Contents are objective, then, by virtue of their having come from (and their retaining a relation to) the margins. By contrast, purely subjective contents would emerge wholly from, and lead exclusively into, the center – a previously subjective field.[93]

The process of contextualization that occurs to a content as it comes into connection with other subjective elements is part and parcel of the process of knowing as "knowledge about" for James. That is, knowledge about is not just mere reference to factual contents in the margins; moreover, knowing also involves relating this object to our other knowings, relating this to the subjective structure we have construed out of all the objective contents previously given. Thus James categorically eschews the exclusively autonomous character of the "given" (or the unrevisable givenness of intentionality).

[92] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 222.

[93] It is quite plausible (and likely common) that a subjective content might refer to another subjective content that eventually has an objective reference. Shortcuts in thought work this way for James.

An additional conclusion we can draw from this account concerns the potential growth of knowledge. Based on the relation of new objects to our subjective knowing, knowledge about is potentially progressive as we move through experience, in the same way that the view from the rear of the train aggregates as the train moves. James thus considers this dynamic construal of the field model inherently to account for verification, or correction, of these contextualizations:

Solipsistically speaking still, in the changed content the central parts although immanently having their own quality and whatness, no longer figure as the whole world but as parts thereof that did so figure once, but are now superseded and corrected. As so corrected, they are inner, but *significant* of that larger outer. The "water" field or datum has developed into the H_2 & O field *continuously*. That is now the physical fact, but the ladder has been pulled up and preserved in this other shape, and what we mean by signifying is *leading* in this continuous way.[94]

The beginning point of a continuous stream of fields is, then, taken as fact, but it is potentially corrected or superseded by later, equally objective (i.e., pointing into the margins) contents. The subjective process of incorporating and contextualizing, then, becomes the standard for adjudicating these various contents, much as one requirement of James's later-articulated pragmatism involves squaring new truths with one's preexisting stock of truths.

For some time in this discussion I have focused on the analysis of the field theory as it elucidates knowledge about. Although James's interest in the course notes revolves around the issue of knowledge about, the model is nonetheless open to analysis statically, wherein the field as phenomenon is not intentional (pointing beyond itself) as in knowledge about, but rather is self-contained and immediate. Temporally speaking, such a state, wherein there was no change in the field, might involve either a brief or a sustained duration. The crucial element for the field admitting of direct acquaintance would be: (1) the lack of an "immediate," continuous leading into something else (another field, or the margins); (2) a corresponding "vividness" that otherwise (in the case of knowledge about) is displaced by such intentionality or relations. James actually describes such a state when referring to the beginning state of the field in his solipsistic example.[95] What is interesting is that this self-contained state and the intentional state are not different in *kind*, but rather only different in *degree* – that is, different in their degrees

[94] James, "The Feelings (1895–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 222. [95] Ibid., pp. 220, 222.

of vividness and operative intentionality. It seems clear on James's model that the incursion of a new content from the margins increases attention to that content, focusing the field more exclusively on the novel element. Direct acquaintance or "pure" experience, then, only admits an extreme degree of such focus, to the exclusion of relations to a beyond found in knowledge about. How exclusive such focus must be for an observer to be in a state of "pure" experience is therefore a practical matter, not a logical one, since neither field (the pure or the intentional) is wholly constituted in actual experience by its distinguishing characteristics.

In providing his account of the field theory, James begins with solipsism, thereby anticipating and defusing his critics' easiest objection. He does not, however, conclude with a solipsistic model. In fact, the lecture notes indicate that, given the very minimal factual claim that fields develop and roll over (that there is some change), he thinks that the field theory defeats its own presupposition of solipsism.[96] The argument is simple. Given the change of the center of the field, whether it be from the intrusion of contents from the margins or a subjective change in the center itself, any field as such must be assumed to point to "an 'eject,' a not yet realized, [which] is continuously connected with the realized." He continues:

> The solipsistic character of the present field seems then by *implication* removed – and removed *actually* so far as the question is raised. Who *asks* "is there *nothing* beyond the present moment" can on grounds of analogy only be answered no, there is *something*. The only way to disbelieve the eject is to abstract from its imminence by not asking whether it be there or no, in other words *not to think of it*, as ordinarily indeed we do not, the present datum being our absolute for the time.[97]

One could, of course, staunchly defend absolute subjectivism here, claiming that all elements themselves emerge from the center of the field. James, however, foils this with his account of a subjective content moving into the margins, such as when an originally subjective feeling (like anxiety) figures eventually as objective, creating physical changes, and even affecting objective aspects of the world beyond the body.[98] In addition to objective changes of the subjective field, then, subjective changes can produce objective effects in the field. Therefore, insofar as there is a change in fields – a stream of fields at all – there is, on

[96] For the factual premise of development, see ibid., pp. 226, 228. [97] Ibid., p. 224.
[98] See ibid., p. 220.

James's view, both potential objectivity and an actual, ejective "more" beyond any present field. Solipsism can be assumed for simplicity of argument, but it cannot, James thinks, be maintained on this view.

That James has been able to move from the formally monistic supposition of one "stuff" to the conclusion that there is a wider, ejective realm of contents beyond any particular field of that "stuff" is a significant development for his project. It is important, he thinks, primarily because it grounds knowing, verification, and a version of objectivity without resorting to dualistic assumptions and their chimerical self-transcendings that bridge the otherwise dualistic chasm. There remains, however, a vexing problem apparent to James at this point: although he has made progress toward his goals with the field theory, his model is still open to a transcendental interpretation. That is, while he prefers to side with common sense, interpreting the world as "a plurality of fields, more or less ejective to each other," he must admit that he has not, as yet, touched transcendental monism's logical contention that this view implies an all-embracing field.[99] Further metaphysical work, then, remains to be done.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After noting that transcendental monism can, unfortunately, interpret his model in a fashion contrary to his own pluralistic liking, James offers a frank assessment of his gains with the field theory:

> We certainly have gained no *stability*. The result is an almost maddening restlessness. The transcendental ego at any rate gives some stability to the view.
>
> But we have gained concreteness. That is, when asked what we *mean* by knowing, ego, physical "thing," memory, etc. we can point to a definite portion of content with a nature definitely realized, and nothing is postulated whose nature is not given in experience-terms. Whereas the common sense terms, with all their stability are "mysteries," so confessed . . . our view defines object subject and knowing as terms continuous in certain verifiable ways, and discontinuous in others, with no need of mysterious conquering.[100]

In these concluding notes for this 1895–6 course, James manifests again his commitment to the central tenets of what he comes to call radical empiricism. His proposal holds itself to high rational standards in its refusal to endorse the "mysterious" entities and processes of so-called

[99] Ibid., p. 228. [100] Ibid., pp. 228–9.

common-sense philosophy, while at the same time fulfilling the oft-overlooked empirical desideratum of concreteness, which idealism fails to satisfy. What James recognizes as well, however, is that the radically empiricist way of thinking, at least as it is construed here, is unable to vanquish the viability of the all-knower posited by transcendental monism. For that argument, one must wait until the middle of the next decade.[101]

The detailed textual analyses of this chapter have demonstrated several things. First, James's significant turn from psychology to metaphysics occurred early in the 1890s, and can be seen to be due in part to his dissatisfaction with his own psychological presuppositions. Second, I have shown that the central components of radical empiricism, with the exception of pragmatism as a theory of truth and panpsychism, were being systematically pursued by James in public settings by 1895. Third, I have gone some distance in exploring the genesis of his central conception of pure experience. And fourth, I have demonstrated how the field theory is explicitly involved with the basic principles of radical empiricism. This reading thus supplants the simple dualistic interpretation that results when the field theory is assumed to derive only from the psychology texts. In the chapter that follows, I shall explore how the earlier dating for radical empiricism and the radically empiricist reading of the field theory reorient our understanding of James's best-known text, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

[101] See chapter 4 below.

CHAPTER 3

"The Varieties of Religious Experience": indications of a philosophy adapted to normal religious needs

Despite the recent renascence of pragmatism, and the corresponding interest in William James's volume of that name, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is generally recognized as James's best-known book. William Clebsch even goes so far as to laud it as "the most famous of all American treatises on religion."[1] In spite of its renown, *Varieties* is also one of the most misunderstood of James's works – misconceived by readers in terms of its intended scope and method, its conception of religion and the religious, and particularly, in terms of its place in James's thought. The most common reading of *Varieties* is guided by obdurate attention to James's reputation as a psychologist and his self-characterization as such early in the text.[2] This interpretation thus concentrates on his categorization of the empirically differentiable varieties of religious experience, leaving philosophical questions about religion to be merely circumscribed, if not circumvented, by these (no doubt valuable) empirical investigations. To read *Varieties* only in this way, however, is to miss the opportunity to understand more fully the place of religion in James's thought. More importantly, this interpretation also overlooks the philosophical ideas and underpinnings indicated, albeit sometimes obliquely, in his most thorough account of religion.

In this chapter I offer an alternative to these readings – a philosophical interpretation of the *Varieties*, which, taking a cue from James's

[1] William A. Clebsch, *American Religious Thought: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 153.

[2] For James's self-characterization, see *Varieties*, p. 12. This reading has also been indirectly encouraged by Perry's division of James's work into periods in *Thought and Character*. In the second volume, *Philosophy and Psychology*, Perry organizes his discussion under "Psychology," "Religion and Morality," and "The Ultimate Philosophical System," treating *Varieties* under "Religion and Morality." Since Perry's work is biographical in structure, the placement of the *Varieties* discussion encourages the reader to assume that it is at most transitional between James's psychological and philosophical periods. Chapter 2 explicitly rebuts this conclusion.

shift in the 1890s, is attentive to explanation over mere description.[3] This reading is intent on emphasizing aspects of James's view of religion in the text that are consistent with, and even dependent on, others of his philosophical views, particularly radical empiricism and its formally monistic thesis of pure experience. Such a philosophical reading is not just one of the possible interpretations of the text; rather, it is also strongly suggested by the circumstances of the conception and composition of the work. I begin, therefore, with a brief historical overview of the period 1897–1902 in which I attend to the discrepancy between James's intended project and the lectures he actually produced, and explore the reasons for and significance of such a discrepancy. From there I proceed to a selective commentary on the text, focusing on the method and hypotheses that guide the argument and elaborating James's empirical understanding of religion. Finally, I turn to his model of religious experience in *Varieties*. In this section I closely analyze his account of conversion and his final hypothetical "over-belief" of "piecemeal supernaturalism," as well as connect this account to his broader philosophical project. By the end of the chapter I hope to have elucidated the uneven and puzzling character of the text, as well as illuminated both his understanding of religion and the likely content of his desire for a "philosophy best adapted to normal religious needs."[4]

SPIRITUAL VISIONS AND BODILY LIMITATIONS: THE COMPOSITION OF *VARIETIES*

The Varieties of Religious Experience is the published form of the series of twenty Gifford Lectures that James delivered in Edinburgh in the summers of 1901 and 1902. The release of the volume coincided with the last lectures in 1902, James having prepared the text by March of that year. Interestingly, the basic chronology of his major publications for the 1890s and early turn of the century – beginning with *The Principles of Psychology* and *Psychology: Briefer Course* in 1890 and 1892, followed by *The Will to Believe* in 1897 and *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* in 1899 – would seem to suggest that his Gifford appointment followed an illustrious and topically varied publication record. In fact, however,

[3] See the discussion of James's shift from descriptive psychology to metaphysics and epistemology in chapter 2.

[4] See the letter from James to Frances R. Morse, 23–4 December 1899, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 112.

the idea of his appointment was broached before the first month of 1897, prior to the public appearance of the collection of philosophical essays comprising *The Will to Believe*, not to mention *Talks to Teachers*. Although most of the *Will to Believe* essays had appeared in journals, at the time of the invitation James's reputation as a philosopher was greatly overshadowed by his psychological accomplishments.

The history of James's appointment to the Gifford Lectures is interesting and quite involved.[5] Initially, he was considered for a Gifford lectureship at Aberdeen for 1898–1900. Preferring the greater honor of a nomination at Edinburgh, as well as a time delay, James lobbied successfully for a bid to the capital city, while at the same time suggesting Josiah Royce for Aberdeen. Justifying his preference for more preparation time, he wrote to Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison at Edinburgh in February 1897 that "For Gifford lectures I want to do my level best, and if possible set down my last will and testament on religious matters."[6] Although James expected to have until 1901–2 for the first course, he was actually appointed for the academic years 1899–1900 and 1900–1.[7]

James's preparation for the lectures appears to have begun in June 1897 when he began assembling biographical material on religious experience, six months prior to the date of his formal appointment as Gifford lecturer by the Senatus.[8] The following summer (1898) he traveled to California to repeat his "Talks to Teachers on Psychology" lectures and give his now famous Berkeley lecture, "Philosophical Conceptions and Practical Results." By the fall of 1898 he began to speak concretely of his Gifford project, indicating that he had in mind a "psychology of the religious consciousness, in its developed state."[9]

5 "The Text of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*," the editor's account of the history of the project in the Harvard *Works* edition of *Varieties*, is comprehensive and unparalleled. Most of the letters and developments I mention here are discussed in greater detail there. Unfortunately for my purposes, the text tends to be more descriptive than interpretive, as well as being general. The selective "re-presentation" here is thus necessitated by my argument concerning the twofold conception of the project and the priority James placed intellectually on the philosophical part.

6 James to Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, 7 February 1897, bMS Am 1092.1 (typed copy), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 521.

7 See the letter from James to Henry James, 7 February 1897, *The Correspondence of William James*, Ignas K. Skrupskelis and Elizabeth Berkeley (eds.), 5 vols. (to date) (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992–8), vol. III, pp. 1–3, summarized and excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 521; and that from Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 12 January 1898, bMS Am 1092 (990).

8 See "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 522.

9 James to Henry W. Rankin, 30 September 1898, bMS Am 1092.4 (26), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 524; see also James to Alice James, 19 October 1898, bMS Am 1092.4 (2090), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 524.

By March 1899, a mere nine months from the planned first lecture, James's conception had broadened. In place of an exclusively descriptive, psychological project, he began to refer to a twofold plan, differentiated according to the two separate courses of lectures (one for each year) but substantively split as well by a difference in approach and topic: the first course was to be psychological, and the second philosophical. To Henry W. Rankin, James wrote: "I must spend the entire summer in Cambridge, getting out my first course. The second course will go easier, as it is more philosophical & technical and I am better prepared."[10] To François Pillon in May 1899 James was more explicit, indicating that the appointment "gives an opportunity for a certain amount of psychology and a certain amount of metaphysics."[11] Suffering problems with his heart, however, when James announced these intentions he had as yet barely written a line.

The onset of the fall of 1899 brought thoughts of a delay of the ensuing lectures scheduled for January, because of James's failure to engage in serious writing. From August to October James and Seth Pringle-Pattison corresponded about a postponement of the lectures and a possible limitation to a single course of ten, resulting in a postponement by the Gifford Senatus in October.[12] The twofold plan itself stayed in place, however, along with a stronger expression of interest on James's part in the second half of the project. To James Mark Baldwin in October 1899 James confessed that "The first course on the Psychology is I regret to say, perfunctory work – scissors and paste as much as possible . . . I should like to put myself in evidence in the second course."[13] In December, having just officially proffered his resignation for 1899–1900 and 1900–1, but expecting a reappointment instead for 1900–1 and 1901–2, James again discussed his twin enterprise, recalling his 1897 "will and testament" language to Seth Pringle-Pattison and associating it with the philosophical rather than the psychological (empirical) project. "I can see my way to a perfectly bully pair of volumes," he wrote to Frances R. Morse, "the first an objective study of the 'Varieties of Religious Experience,' the second, my own last will

[10] James to Rankin, 3 March 1899, bMS Am 1092.1 (29), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 525.

[11] James to François Pillon, 31 May 1899, bMS Am 1092.1 (3500), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 525.

[12] See Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 13 August 1899, bMS Am 1092 (993), 18 October 1899, bMS Am 1092 (994), and 29 October 1899, bMS Am 1092 (995).

[13] James to James Mark Baldwin, 16 October 1899, bMS Am 1092.1 (t.c.), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 528.

and testament, setting forth the philosophy best adapted to normal religious needs."[14]

The reappointment for 1900–1 and 1901–2 came through in January 1900, along with a reiteration by Seth that the committee hoped still to get two courses from James.[15] In February 1900 James began serious writing, producing lectures 1 and 2 in rather short order. By September 1900, however, he had only completed four lectures. Although he assured Seth then that the first course would certainly be completed in time, he decided to resign again, this time only from the second ten lectures. James indicated in his letter of resignation that fortunately, since the two courses were so different in subject, the first could stand alone. Regarding the second, philosophical course, James informed Seth that he planned, nonetheless, to complete it, indicating that in it lay his real interest. "I trust to be able to write out this second course in which I am deeply interested and which will be my first and last effort at original metaphysical construction, and publish it as a book as rapidly as my health allows the work to be done," James wrote. "It will be called 'The Tasks of Religious Philosophy.'"[16] An outline for the first course followed immediately in the letter, along with the comment that "The second course, or rather the philosophical sequel of the first, ought, on the contrary, to be highly abstract."

Seth responded supportively to James's request, noting that he thought James was "wise in abandoning the hope of writing the second course."[17] Later in the letter, however, Seth laments the late date of the resignation, noting that the Gifford Senatus will likely be unable to fill the post. He then suggests that James might split the single course of lectures in two, giving half each year of his two-year appointment. "Of course, you would only have the single year's salary, and I do not mention this as a counsel of delay, but merely to inform you that you must give yourself no anxiety about coming up to time with a fixed quantum of work," Seth wrote. "We will take what you can give and when you can give it." The Gifford Committee went on in the next month to fix a summer date for the first course, unusual though that was for the lectures.[18]

[14] James to Morse, 23 December 1899, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 112.

[15] See Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 12 January 1900, bMS Am 1092 (996).

[16] James to Seth Pringle-Pattison, 27 September 1900, bMS Am 1092.1 (t.c.), excerpted in part in "The Text of *Varieties*," pp. 534–5. See also the letter from James to Josiah Royce, 26 September 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, pp. 136–7.

[17] Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 3 October 1900, bMS Am 1092 (997).

[18] Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 9 October 1900, bMS Am 1092 (998).

James's letters immediately following this do not reflect any definite reconsideration, either of his resignation or of his outline. What is interesting, however, is the strong resemblance between his outline for the first ten lectures, included in his 27 September 1900 letter of resignation from the second course, and the final form of the twenty lectures actually given. The outline on the left, entitled "The Varieties of Religious Experience," is reproduced from the 1900 letter, while that on the right is from the 1902 book (staggered to facilitate comparison):[19]

Outline, 27 September 1900		**Contents, *Varieties* (1902)**	
1	Is Religion a "Neurosis"?	1	Religion and Neurology
2	Is Religion a "Survival"?	2	Circumscription of the Topic
3	The Reality of things unseen	3	The Reality of the Unseen
4	The Once-born, and the attitude of Healthy-mindedness	4, 5	The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness
5	The Sick Soul	6, 7	The Sick Soul
6	Heterogeneous personality, the Twice-born and Redemption	8	The Divided Self, and the Process of its Unification
7	Regeneration, Conversion, etc.	9	Conversion
		10	Conversion-Concluded
8	Sanctification, Asceticism, etc.	11–13	Saintliness
		14, 15	The Value of Saintliness
9	Mysticism and Faith	16, 17	Mysticism
		18	Philosophy
		19	Other Characteristics
10	Results	20	Conclusions
			Postscript

When James composed the September 1900 outline, he had completed and sent off lectures 1–3 to his brother Henry and had a draft of lecture 4 as well as some material on mysticism. Comparing the two outlines, one can see that lectures 1–3 are more or less identical on each plan.[20] Beginning with lecture 4, however, each topic planned for

[19] The 1900 outline is in the letter from James to Seth Pringle-Pattison, dated 27 September 1900, bMS Am 1092.1 (t.c.). See "The Text of *Varieties*," pp. 534–5, for a reprint of the full letter. For the contents (1902), see James, *Varieties*, pp. 7–10. I have altered the format and numerical notation style of each list, and removed terminal periods and corrected the spelling "heterogenuous" in the 1900 outline.

[20] There is an obvious question as to the similarity in content of lecture 2. In April 1900 while working on lecture 3, James wrote to Frances Morse that lecture 2 had to be rewritten entirely. See James to Morse, 12–13 April 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 127. Although it is unclear whether it was entirely rewritten, and if so, when, there are several draft pages (bMS Am 1092.9 [4482]) extant which Perry concluded came from lecture 2. The pages are reprinted as "Appendix II," in James, *Varieties*, pp. 483–5.

a single lecture in 1900 receives two or more lectures in the final version, with the exception of lecture 6 on the divided self. It seems probable that, in response to Seth's concern about the lectureship being empty and his proposal of splitting the lectures (albeit in a different fashion), James proceeded to extend the material he had already planned from ten into twenty lectures, still leaving the philosophical material aside.[21]

James provides an unintentional response to this question of the outlines in the preface to the published text penned in March 1902:

> In casting about me for subjects of the two courses of ten lectures each for which I thus became responsible, it seemed to me that the first course might well be a descriptive one on "Man's Religious Appetites," and the second a metaphysical one on "Their Satisfaction through Philosophy." But the unexpected growth of the psychological matter as I came to write it out has resulted in the second subject being postponed entirely, and the description of man's religious constitution now fills the twenty lectures.[22]

There is no doubt that when he came to write it out finally, the psychological material had grown. Whether its growth was wholly "unexpected" or deliberate, however, is open to question.

James's references to writing the first course, particularly around the time of his proposed resignation from the second, are instructive. At the end of September 1900, he had tendered his resignation – and to his mind actually withdrawn – from the second course. On 13 November 1900 James informed his brother Henry that he had finished lecture 5, except for several pages on John Bunyan, and that he was into lecture 6. Since Bunyan appears in the final version in the combined chapter on "The Sick Soul" (comprising lectures 6 and 7), and "The Sick Soul" was the topic of lecture 5 on the 1900 outline, it follows that in November 1900 James was still working according to his original plan to cover all ten topics in the first ten lectures.[23]

James appears to have completed lecture 6 (on heterogeneous personality in the original plan) shortly thereafter, since in December and

[21] There is ample evidence for James's feelings of guilt about the delays in his letters from the period. See "The Text of *Varieties*" for relevant correspondence.

[22] James, *Varieties*, p. 5.

[23] For the Bunyan references see James, *Varieties*, pp. 132, 134. Lectures 6–7 are twenty-nine pages long, placing the apparent dividing line between lectures 6 and 7 around p. 123. The references to Bunyan, then, appear to be in lecture 7. The manuscripts for the Gifford Lectures are not extant, with the exception of those for lectures 19 and 20, however, so a clearer delineation can, unfortunately, not be made.

January he spoke of having four more lectures to write.[24] Lecture 7 (presumably on regeneration and conversion) he declared complete on 9 January 1901.[25] Ten days later James wrote to Flournoy that he had two and a half lectures left to go, putting him, one would surmise, into lecture 8 on sanctification (following the 1900 outline). However, he also asked Flournoy for a book on the life of Hudson Taylor, who is referred to in lecture 10 of the actual lectures, "Conversion-Concluded," thus raising the question of whether he was still on conversion, the topic for lecture 7, rather than sanctification, that planned for lecture 8.[26] Six days later James indicated to Henry that he had indeed completed eight lectures, "long enough to fill 10 hours in the reading. But 3 more long chapters are required for the *book*, and the job is sticking too long to my tired fingers."[27] The reference to "3 more long chapters" here implies that the eighth lecture completed was not, in fact, on sanctification as planned, but rather was "Conversion-Concluded" as the Flournoy letter also suggests. The topics of the 1900 outline, therefore, had without a doubt begun to be extended beyond their single lecture allotments by 25 January 1901.

Given the "three long chapters" comment, it seems clear that as late as early January 1901, James still had his mind focused on the immediate task of exhausting the ten topics within the bounds of the first course. His reference to the chapters for the book also suggests that as yet he had no plan or intentions for developing the descriptive material into a second course of lectures for the following year. At the end of 1900, then, either he was still wedded to his intention to resign the second course altogether, or he was thinking of proceeding with the philosophical course as planned, since in either case he would have exhausted the descriptive material in the first course. A note to R. B. Perry on 5 February 1901 lends credence to the latter interpretation. There James indicates that he planned to give only one class the following year at Harvard (he was scheduled to return for the academic year) on the philosophy of religion.[28] Further supporting the idea that

[24] See the letter from James to Pillon, 12 December 1900, bMS Am 1092.1 (3509), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 537; and that to Rankin, 1 January 1901, bMS Am 1092.1 (31).

[25] See the card from James to his son Henry, 9 January 1901, fMS Am 1092.4.

[26] See the letter from James to Théodore Flournoy, 19 January 1901, *The Letters of William James and Théodore Flournoy*, Robert C. Le Clair (ed.) (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p. 109. For the reference to Taylor, see James, *Varieties*, p. 200 n. 12.

[27] James to Henry James, 25 January 1901, *Correspondence of William James*, vol. III, pp. 160–1, excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 538.

[28] James to Perry, 5 February 1901, bMS Am 1092.1 (3438), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 538.

James still planned the philosophical course is the fact that the first half of the published lecture 10, "Conversion-Concluded" (which James was writing when he wrote Flournoy for the Hudson material), is some of the most philosophically sophisticated analysis that James provides in *Varieties*. As I shall demonstrate in more detail below, in lecture 10 he offers a model of consciousness (and, potentially, even reality) based on his 1895 field theory to account for conversion. Instead of leading directly into the next topic of sanctification, the "fruits of religion," given their philosophical bent the lectures on conversion could just as well be seen to lead naturally into a consideration of the philosophical view best suited to account for such phenomena. On the basis of these considerations, then, James must have been at a crucial turning point in composing his "eighth" lecture on conversion in January 1901.[29]

On 3 February 1901 Seth replied to a positive progress report from James that his only regret was "that we let you off the second course, for apparently the surplusage of your first course seemed amply . . . to furnish . . . another banquet, say, in the autumn. But I will not tempt you," he continued, "and shall thankfully receive what the gods give us."[30] During the next week, Seth received a letter from James indicating that he would, in fact, take on a second course of lectures based on the topics of the first. Seth responded on 8 February 1901 to James that "You could give your second course (i.e., not your second course as planned originally, but the surplus of your first course) any time after Oct. 15 at the rate of two lectures a week."[31] Clearly, between January and early February James decided to follow Seth's suggestion that rather than resigning or moving to the philosophical material, he could instead just extend the material for the first course. For James, given that topics 1–7 were completed in January, this implied expanding the final three subjects of his 1900 outline into another course of Giffords for the following year. In its review of the final lecture of 1901, *The Scotsman* reported that James had indicated a series of topics for the second course consistent with, though more extensive than, the remaining topics

[29] There is an interesting continuity between the first half of the text up to the middle of lecture 10 and that of lecture 20, James's conclusions – a continuity that is both thematic and terminological, which does not, for the most part, animate the intervening text of lectures 10–20. It is quite possible that part of the conclusions were initially written as the conclusion to what is now lecture 10, prior to the change of subject that occurs midway through that lecture as we have it. See James, *Varieties*, p. 198, for the abrupt shift in lecture 10.

[30] Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 3 February 1901, bMS Am 1092 (1000).

[31] Seth Pringle-Pattison to James, 8 February 1901, bMS Am 1092 (1001).

on his 1900 outline.[32] By early February 1901, then, he had definitively left behind the idea of a philosophical project for the second course.[33] That he was not altogether satisfied with this decision, however, one can see in his self-critical comments to Schiller before delivering the second course:

> after sixty, if ever, one feels as if one ought to come to some sort of equilibrium with one's native environment, and by means of a regular life get one's small message to mankind on paper. That nowadays is my only aspiration. The Gifford lectures are all facts and no philosophy.[34]

The explicit philosophical "last will and testament" mentioned to Seth Pringle-Pattison and Morse, and indicated to Royce, was thus relegated to a book never to be completed.[35]

REMNANTS OF THE PLAN FOR THE PHILOSOPHICAL COURSE

In addition to satisfying historical questions, the preceding discussion indicates two important points about James's ordeal in preparing his Gifford lectures. First, his *interest* in (and his estimation of the value of) the philosophical questions relevant to religion appears never actually to have waned or been eclipsed by the descriptive project, the final form of *Varieties* notwithstanding. Second, the actual first ten lectures (with the possible exception of the latter half of lecture 10) appear to have been written under the guiding idea of being followed directly by a complementary philosophical discussion, whether in lecture or book form. Until less than five months prior to delivery of the first course, James appears not to have given up the idea of the philosophical

[32] See the *Scotsman* account, reprinted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 544. Topics suggested are: saintly life, mystical experiences, faith, three or four lectures on the relation of religious experience with the institutions of ecclesiastical life, with theology and philosophy, and finally, with primitive thought. Obviously, James did not follow them strictly, allowing the earlier topics (from the 1900 outline) to eclipse the final ones with respect to space. Primitive thought is excised altogether, except for brief mention in lectures 4–5, and the cursory treatment of religion as a survival in lecture 20. See pp. 102, 386–93. (NB: James initially intended the topic of the survival theory as that of lecture 2.)

[33] James corroborates the account from *The Scotsman* in a 10 July 1901 letter to Stumpf, writing, "Next year I give 10 more lectures on the same subject." Excerpted in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 199.

[34] James to Schiller, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 165.

[35] James attempted to write a book in 1903–4, *The Many and the One*, which seems to correspond to the goals he had for the second half of the Gifford Lectures. The manuscript fragments are reprinted in James, *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, pp. 3–61. Sections of *Pragmatism* can be read to take up this challenge again, as can *A Pluralistic Universe* (see chapter 4).

complement in any respect.[36] A philosophical reading of *Varieties* such as I propose – a reading which seeks to link the descriptive project to James's philosophical vision – is, then, all the more plausible, if not all the more necessary for understanding the text we have. Fortunately, this kind of circumstantial evidence is not all that is available. There is also a notebook extant with titles, plans, and thoughts for the philosophical course.

The notebook is inscribed both backward and forward – that is, James wrote on the right-hand side of the notebook all the way through, while also writing sequentially through the book with it flipped over, upside down.[37] Numerous stubs indicate that pages have been torn out. The first extant page, reading from front to back, consists of pairs of titles for the two courses of Gifford Lectures. The initial pair of these is "I. The Varieties of Religious Experience" and "II. The Tasks of Religious Philosophy," corresponding to the titles James used in his September 1900 letter to Seth Pringle-Pattison.[38] When the notebook is flipped over, read from back to front upside down, the first page includes another series of titles, this time only for the second, philosophical course. On the back side of the following page, James wrote a ten-point outline, titled "2nd. Course," as follows:

1. The deification of unity.
2. Its various meanings pragmatically considered.
3. Cases of nextness, conterminousness and its defence as an ultimate relation.
4. The eject reduced to familiarity
5. The relation of knowing.
6. Demolish Bradley
7. Demolish Royce.
8. Explain pragmatism.
9. Substitution – termination
10. Evolution.[39]

From this outline of the second course alone, an immediate conclusion may be drawn supporting my argument in chapter 2: even though James actually proceeds in the descriptive lectures that we now have as

[36] Even then, there is no evidence that James gave up the idea, but only with reference to the Giffords.

[37] It is unclear whether James wrote in the notebook concurrently, or first wrote in one direction before reversing it. Given the topical continuity, concurrent writing is more likely.

[38] "The Varieties of Religious Experience" is in pencil, while both roman numerals and the second title are in pen. The notebook, bMS Am 1092.9 (4509), is reprinted *in toto* as "Appendix IV" in James, *Varieties*. See p. 491. For accessibility, I refer henceforth to the reprinted edition.

[39] James, "Appendix IV," *Varieties*, p. 493.

Varieties according to standard dualistic psychological presuppositions, this outline demonstrates an overt commitment to radically empiricist ideas. Topics 3, 4, 5, and 9 all relate explicitly to the material James discussed in both "The Knowing of Things Together" and his 1895–6 Psychological Seminary on "The Feelings." Topic 3 takes up the factual thesis of radical empiricism concerning the reality of relations of both continuity and discontinuity. Topic 4 appears to refer to James's argument in the notes for "The Feelings" that solipsism defeats itself on the radically empiricist rendering of the field theory. Topic 5 alludes to James's considerations of the function of knowing in both "The Knowing of Things Together" and "The Feelings." And topic 9 continues on knowing, considering directly the problem of objective reference that was only briefly broached in both of the 1895 texts. There is little doubt, then, that James intended to connect concretely his descriptive project on religion with his radically empiricist metaphysical *Weltanschauung*.

To facilitate my argument concerning the close connection between the descriptive project that is *Varieties* and the philosophical project that was not completed, it would be ideal if this notebook were obviously concurrent with the writing of the first course. Unfortunately, the notebook is difficult to date. As mentioned above, James wrote to Morse in December 1899 that he could see his way clear "to a bully . . . pair of volumes," with the second setting forth "the philosophy best adapted to normal religious needs."[40] This suggests that by the end of 1899 he had begun to think concretely on both courses, but it is not conclusive. The only informative marker for dating within the notebook itself is a reference to volume I of Royce's *The World and the Individual* on the eighth page after the outline for the second course.[41] James read that volume in January 1900, just after it was published and a month after penning the "bully volumes" comment.[42] Since the notebook pages are written in sequence (and marked sequentially by letter), everything following the Royce reference on the philosophical side of the notebook can be assumed to come after the middle of January 1900.[43] As lectures 1–3 were written between February and April of 1900, we can

[40] James to Morse, 23 December 1899, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 112.

[41] See James, "Appendix IV," *Varieties*, p. 496. The Royce reference is to Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1900, 1901, reprint, 1908), vol. I, p. 390.

[42] See the letter from James to Bessie (Mrs. Glendower) Evans, 17 January 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 113.

[43] Included among the pages datable after January 1900 is James's reference to pure experience in German – as "my *reine erfahrung*" – discussed in the previous chapter. See James, "Appendix IV," *Varieties*, p. 497.

therefore reasonably place James's serious and detailed consideration of the philosophical course very close to his actual composition of part of what we now have as *Varieties*. This corroborates, then, the historical reconstruction of the previous section.[44]

Issues of dating aside, the content of the notebook is suggestive of a close relation between the planned second course of lectures and the radically empiricist world-view discussed in chapters 1 and 2. In addition to what we can glean from the titles, in the notebook James explicitly discusses his 1895 "The Knowing of Things Together," even reproducing what he calls the "knots figure," which he interprets here to illustrate how the same object can appear in different subjects.[45] He also raises the relation of thoughts and things, pure experience, the relation of parts to wholes, pluralism, and panpsychism, underscoring the second course–radical empiricism connection.[46]

In perhaps the most overt example bridging the 1895 material and *Varieties* as we have it, James's notebook also yields a self-analysis based on the field theory of consciousness. Presumably writing between April and October 1900, James considers his own despairing state, debilitated as he is by coronary problems:

> The little black center of my field has practically obliterated for me all the effulgent spheres of light and life that lie about it. The thought of nobody else's days of decline ever filled me with just this pining mood . . .
>
> Meanwhile as between the general view . . . and the actually realized presence of my own case, there is no difference whatever in the facts admitted. The only difference is in the moods aroused . . . These emotional colour-tones are independent variables susceptible, according to the constitution of the individual, of combining with any intellectual content whatever, of being transposed and permuted on occasion. With a given field of objects they

[44] There is a tantalizing, but ultimately indeterminate, parallel between a postcard to Royce on 8 September 1900 and a rather dark passage in the notebook (after the January 1900 passage). The card reads: "I will say nothing but that it has been a sadly disappointing year, and 'the end is not yet.' Do my darnedest, and I have only succeeded in executing 4 lectures for the next winter . . . The worst of it is that both courses are fully ripe inside me, and I only lack the strength to write them down." In the notebook, James writes, "I find myself in a cold, pinched, quaking state when I think of the probability of dying soon with all my music in me." For the card, see bMS Am 1092.1 (3628), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 532. For the notebook passage, see James, "Appendix iv," *Varieties*, p. 498. James appears to have written the actual lecture on the sick soul (to which this pertains) in October, and certainly by the middle of November, as can be seen from his use of Schiller's Greek quotations. Cf. *Varieties*, p. 120, and the letter from James to Schiller, 6 October 1900 (original in the Stanford University Libraries), excerpted in "The Text of *Varieties*," p. 535.

[45] James, "Appendix iv," *Varieties*, p. 494. Cf. James, "The Knowing of Things Together," *Essays in Philosophy*, p. 76.

[46] See James, "Appendix iv," *Varieties*, pp. 494–8.

follow the emphasis laid on this part or that. When once there, they are absolutes.[47]

The determinate objective element, unyielding in terms of its content, is here James's ill-health, his frail heart in particular. Yet the field of reality is also constituted by subjective aspects and elements, in this case those subjective elements that narrow James's own attention and darken his mood – the independently variable, emotional elements. The field as a whole, and reality insofar as it be taken as a "full fact," is a compendium of these two elements – the unyielding objective content and the subjective associations and tonalities. Such a field is, to quote the conclusions of *Varieties*, "a conscious field *plus* its object as felt or thought of *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs."[48] Such a concrete bit of experience is a *full* fact, and in this particular case, a rather *objective* fact as well. Thus not only are James's philosophical theories involved in his analysis and understanding of religious experience, but both of these projects are intimately involved in his own self-understanding.

One could speculate at great length (and indeed many have) about James's psychological situation and motivations in the difficult circumstances he experienced when composing his Gifford Lectures. There is, however, a near limit to the objective material available for such reconstructions. A preponderance of evidence does, in any case, suggest that it is more than just plausible to look for a significant philosophical side to what we have as *Varieties*. Further, the material reviewed here and in the preceding chapter indicates that the content of that philosophical analysis would likely be consistent with James's radical empiricism. The most important source of confirmation remains, however, and that is the text of *Varieties* itself; thus to that I now turn.

VARIETIES: THE BASIC ARGUMENT

Given the history of their composition, it is not surprising that the lectures constituting *Varieties* are somewhat uneven in texture and content. There is, nonetheless, a basic argument to the text taken as a whole that loosely dictates the structure and progression of the lectures. In addition, there are a number of themes to which James returns. A brief look at the methodology of the argument, the hypothesis that guides it, and the progression of the rest of the text, then, will prove

[47] Ibid., pp. 498–9. [48] James, *Varieties*, p. 393.

helpful to understanding the broader, philosophical view of *Varieties* that I am attempting to bring into sharper focus.

Method and procedure

As discussed above, when James conceived of the two courses of lectures in 1899, he had in mind separate descriptive and philosophical projects corresponding to each course of lectures. In lecture 1 of *Varieties*, after asserting that as a psychologist he really can engage only in description (as opposed to explanation or evaluation), he implicitly justifies this dual conception in his distinction between existential and spiritual judgments. "The question, What are the religious propensities? and the question What is their philosophic significance? are two entirely different orders of question from the logical point of view," he writes.[49] The former is a question of nature, origin, and constitution; the latter, of importance, meaning, or significance. In considering this oft-quoted distinction, it is crucial to recognize that the two orders of question, and their answers, are distinct for James: the existential question of nature or origin is not deducible from that of value, and conversely, the question of meaning or value does not derive from that of nature or origin.[50] The descriptive project, then, is in an important sense independent from the philosophical project, and vice versa.

If these two orders of inquiry are characterized thus, it seems at first that James is adopting a kind of fact/value dichotomy, with existential judgment pertaining to fact, and spiritual judgment relating to value. That nothing could be further from his mind, however, can be seen if we attend for a moment to his analogous view of the "special sciences" penned in 1892 and discussed above. In the conclusion to *Briefer Course*, James characterized each of the special sciences – such as psychology, mechanics, or geology – as pursuing a descriptive project, one determined by their specific and fixed interests or goals. Although each of these sciences is, depending on its specific definition, able to pursue cause and effect, as independently constituted, each is unable to evaluate questions concerning its own presuppositions and constitution, much

[49] Ibid., p. 13.

[50] It is interesting to note that James attends here to what G. E. Moore is often credited as recognizing – the genetic fallacy. The distinction is actually longstanding in Continental philosophy, occurring, e.g., in J. J. Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, and, perhaps more famously in Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (which, incidentally, James comments on at length in *Varieties*).

less questions of conflict with other special sciences. The only arena for that level of discussion on James's view in *Briefer Course* is philosophy, or metaphysics.

The principal distinction between existential and spiritual judgments in *Varieties* can fruitfully be understood to be analogous to James's 1892 distinction between the special sciences and metaphysics (or philosophy). Strictly speaking, the distinction in both cases is one of scope. Existential judgments, like special sciences, have a very focused viewpoint: they assume the existence of the phenomenon they consider (thus "existential"), and seek to understand its details and particularities, much as James's psychology assumed the existence of states of mind and brain states, and sought to specify their particulars and correlate them. Spiritual judgments, on the other hand, are characterized by their very broad perspective, thus sharing the characteristic of metaphysics from *Briefer Course*. They look at the whole and evaluate the part with respect to it. Considering values for James, then, does not mean abandoning the realm of fact; rather, it means asking questions of fact that pertain to a broader whole. Spiritual judgments, therefore, concern broad patterns of factual relation among particulars, while existential judgments attend to particulars without recourse to these broader relations.

Understanding spiritual and existential judgments in this way, one can see that for James neither inquiry prescinds from the empirical in any meaningful respect, regardless of how it might seem at first glance.[51] In developing his existential/spiritual distinction he is not, however, out to side only with empiricism. In fact, he chooses his terms carefully when distinguishing the "spiritual" judgment from the "existential." Allying "spiritual" with the broader perspective, he moves again to appropriate the tradition of idealism, much as we saw in the previous chapter's discussion of his "idealistic" turn in "The Knowing of Things Together." Also similarly to that treatment, here in *Varieties* we find him associating idealism directly with empiricism, seeking to wrest the empirical mantle from the (reductive) materialists.[52] Differing from the 1895 discussion, however, is his evocation of nineteenth-century idealism

[51] This proves true in the text, insofar as when James turns to the fruits of religion – to the value of saintliness, for example – he employs description, nonetheless focusing it on a broader range of phenomena, usually a whole human life.

[52] See, e.g., James's argument that the medical materialists are dogmatists in looking only at the origin, whereas empiricism (true empiricism) looks to "the way in which it works on the whole." James, *Varieties*, p. 24.

through the term "spirit," where in 1895 he had pointed to Berkeley as the empirico-idealistic exemplar. What is the same in both cases nonetheless is a leveling of the playing field of the kinds of "things" or data under consideration. By this I mean that in both the 1895 texts and *Varieties* James opts for what we can at least call a formal monism – and therefore something akin to idealism – through refusing to consider thoughts and things to be adequately handled when they are treated as being of fundamentally different orders, or worse, when one order is considered epiphenomenal to the other (usually thoughts to things).[53]

If James's empiricism in *Varieties* is to be associated with a form of idealism, what, one might ask, is he really arguing against? In a letter to Morse in April 1900, James wrote that he had two tasks in *Varieties*, the first of which was:

> to defend (against all the prejudices of my "class") "experience" against "philosophy" as being the real backbone of the world's religious life – I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning.[54]

By "philosophy" here, James really has in mind the "absolute" branch of idealism that takes thought and feeling, or philosophy and experience, as inherently separated by a difference in ultimate value. On such views, what is spiritual or valuable in religion is the system of thought that is developed rather than the experiences, practical changes, or feelings that are effected. Such a view in *Varieties* usually goes by the name of "rationalism," and is characterized by a preference for logic over feeling, or as James puts it in his conclusion, "thought" over "reality."[55]

The general argument in *Varieties* does tend to emphasize feelings or experiences to the significant detriment of thought or understanding. At the same time, however, one can also plausibly read James's criticism of rationalism more as a rejection of its exclusion and neglect of feeling than of its actual treatment of thought or conceptual representation in religion. This interpretation can be buttressed by considering further his understanding of spiritual judgments. Discussing the nature of spiritual judgments, he specifies two criteria, one analogous to feeling (the moment narrowly taken) and the other to thought or understanding (the broader perspective):

53 See James's dismissal of "Modern Idealism" for treating thoughts and experience as of fundamentally different orders, *Varieties*, p. 358.

54 James to Morse, 12 April 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 127.

55 See James, *Varieties*, p. 394. When indicating rationalism, James has in mind both Royce and Bradley, as well as numerous others. See, e.g., ibid., pp. 66, 335, 353.

Their [religious opinions'] value can only be ascertained by spiritual judgments directly passed upon them, judgments based on our own immediate feeling primarily; and secondarily on what we can ascertain of their experiential relations to our moral needs and to the rest of what we hold as true.

Immediate luminousness, in short, *philosophical reasonableness*, and *moral helpfulness* are the only available criteria.[56]

Thus although James clearly underlines the value of immediate feeling, the priority apparent in his presentation of these two criteria (placing feeling primary) is not an ultimate ordering; rather, it is a logical – one might even say an existential – delineation. The two criteria do not always agree in fact, and when they do not, settling their priority ultimately requires taking the wider, even more spiritual perspective (which includes, I might add, the narrower feeling). James clarifies:

Now the more intrinsic and the more remote of these criteria do not always hang together. Inner happiness and serviceability do not always agree. What immediately feels most "good" is not always most "true," when measured by the verdict of the rest of experience.[57]

Thus while James's text tends rhetorically to emphasize feeling over thought – or the narrow, intrinsic perspective over the wider and inherently more circumspect one – he recognizes that when there is a conflict in these criteria, neither component of the spiritual judgment may simply be granted hegemonic sway. On this reading, then, what he is defending most fundamentally in *Varieties* is a form of holistic philosophical pluralism, one which in particular seeks to treat thought and feeling as of the same order as a matter of course, making distinctions between and among them on a case-relative, practical basis. In comparison with reductive materialism and (reductive) absolute idealism, this pluralistic idealism (or pluralistic monism) seeks to be inclusive rather than exclusive, building out the world through thought, analysis, and description, rather than separating, rendering, and reducing it on logical or dogmatic principles.[58] James no doubt does conclude by inclining his treatment of religion toward feeling and experience rather than thought and system. As we shall see, however, this preference is not absolute, or based "on principle." Instead, it depends on the particular workings of the phenomenon of religion as James finds and understands it within experience.

[56] James, *Varieties*, p. 23. [57] Ibid., p. 22.

[58] James employs this pluralistic, or "inclusive," principle in evaluating the mind-cure movement positively. See also James's criticism of rationalism for accounting only for a superficial part of mental life. See *Varieties*, pp. 114, 66–7.

In the letter to Morse just mentioned, James also indicates a second goal for his lectures:

> [I have set myself] to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function.[59]

The project that James circumscribes here can (and perhaps should) be seen as a rather non-empirical project, making him as much of a dogmatist as the next rationalist. That is, he appears to be putting the cart before the horse concerning the ultimate spiritual judgment of religion, since, as we saw when considering the composition of *Varieties*, James had not yet begun the empirical portion of the lectures at the time of this letter. This criticism is corroborated by his statement a line later that "to attempt it [making the reader believe his view of religion] is *my* religious act." How, then, are we to evaluate James's methodological scruples?

To dismiss *Varieties* out of hand as having been overly determined from the start by James's own over-beliefs would, I think, be unwarranted. This is so in part because such a judgment would rest on an unnecessarily naive view of empirical procedure, theory formation, and experimental testing – a view much more naive than James's own. Trained in experimental science as he was, James was well aware of the inherently theory-laden nature of hypothesis formulation. The crucial question is not whether one has formulated an hypothesis in a vacuum (for that is not possible), but rather, whether one's hypothesis both accounts for the data in question and proves to account for, or produce, something further. In lecture 20 James says as much when discussing his own over-beliefs: "A good hypothesis in science must have other properties than those of the phenomenon it is immediately invoked to explain, otherwise it is not prolific enough."[60] It follows that his eventual claim about the function of religion must, then, account for the data he poses as well as any other data that anyone could reasonably suggest; in addition, however, it must go a bit further, opening at least some new avenues of understanding and experience. Although he states explicitly that knowledge about life cannot substitute for living, on analogy to hypotheses valid spiritual judgments can and probably must be seen to be productive of value in at least some minimal sense,

[59] James to Morse, 12 April 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 127.
[60] James, *Varieties*, p. 407.

in addition to estimating worth.[61] It follows, then, that James's two questions in lecture 1, his two forms of judgment, and his two tasks mentioned to Morse can be seen to be mapped onto one another as follows:

Group 1	**Group 2**
What are the religious propensities?	What is their philosophical significance?
Existential judgments	Spiritual judgments
Defending experience versus philosophy	Arguing that religion is humankind's most important function.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, the two questions, tasks, and judgments can be understood to be complexly interrelated, with the latter set (the philosophical, spiritual, religiously apologetic) ultimately having more significance than the former. James may in fact have embarked explicitly only on the descriptive project in what we now have as *Varieties*; however, on the basis of his own distinctions, the philosophical project can never be kept wholly at bay. Conversely, we can expect that in his treatment of philosophical issues, however sparse or extended, the empirical evidence can never be far from hand.[62] Such is the appearance of a radically empiricist world-view.

Hypothetical beginnings

As I indicated in the historical survey, most of *Varieties* is devoted to description. Not surprisingly, however, the descriptive project itself is structured to make a strong empirical case for James's psychological and philosophical explanations of the phenomena of religious experience. In the opening lectures, prior to launching the descriptive project, he takes some time to specify generally what he has in mind by "religion" in addition to discussing his method. Widely quoted and much discussed, his initial delineation of religion includes five salient features.

In the first of these James limits his consideration of religion to individual experience rather than institutional structures or systems of thought. Often the source of sustained criticism, this selection is, however, easily justified by him as following from his initial scientific perspective of psychology. Since psychology for James takes the particular

[61] For the knowledge/life reference see James, *Varieties*, p. 386.
[62] This also proves true in *A Pluralistic Universe*. See chapter 4.

mind as the unit of analysis, individuals must be the focus. As I argue below, this limitation does not prove as arbitrary as it may seem, since James's *philosophical* understanding of religion ultimately privileges the experience of the individual as the *sine qua non* of religion as well.

The second salient feature of James's approach to religion is the limitation of his subject group to extreme cases, or "religious geniuses." James justifies this on the grounds that "it always leads to a better understanding of a thing's significance to consider its exaggerations and perversions, its equivalents and substitutes and nearest relatives elsewhere." Such extreme cases "isolate special factors of the mental life," he argues, providing acquaintance with the range of variation of a phenomenon, both in its environment and without.[63]

James's selection of extreme cases is also related to the third salient feature of his specification of religion: the factual stipulation that religious states of mind are not "unique" in kind, but rather are normal emotional or mental states conjoined with a peculiar sort of object. This delineation is actually a provisional empirical generalization rather than a definition. Interestingly, it can also be read as an application of his pragmatic principle of meaning, in that it looks to determine the content of a conception (here a religious emotion) by asking what it may be known as in practice and experience. Insofar as James's pragmatic determination is true (he really just asserts that it is so), it justifies the selection of extreme cases because one can more easily separate what is peculiarly religious about the object of the extreme state of experience in contrast to the normal feeling or emotion.

In addition to understanding this as a factual generalization, James's specification of the ordinary character of religious states of mind can also be interpreted as an application of the methodological thesis of radical empiricism, according to which no entities or states that transcend experience may be assumed to exist.[64] On this presupposition, religion could not be anything other than a relatively normal state of experience peculiarly determined, since we could not know of it if it were, in Rudolph Otto's terms, "wholly other."

The fourth feature of James's demarcation of religion is his clarification of the determinative object of religious experience as that which is "godlike" – that to which one responds "solemnly and gravely, with

63 James, *Varieties*, p. 26.
64 As mentioned in chapter 1, this thesis was explicitly named in the preface to James's 1897 *Will to Believe*, as well as indicated strongly in the 1895 "The Knowing of Things Together."

neither curse nor jest."[65] This feature, like the normalcy of emotions, can also be seen as both a provisional empirical generalization and a pragmatic specification of meaning, insofar as it looks to the difference the object makes in human practice (the solemn response) to determine its meaning. In a related judgment, James's eventual differentiation of religion from morality, where religion is distinguished by its affirmative mood, is also the result of an extended application of the pragmatic principle, as well as an expansion of his initial specification of the "religious" mood, and by extension, the religious object.[66]

The fifth important feature of James's circumscription of religion is his clarification that the phenomenon of religion can be distinguished insofar as the individual apprehends himself or herself to be in *relation* to a "godlike" object. In a frequently quoted passage, he writes: "Religion, therefore, as I now arbitrarily take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*."[67] The first question one might ask is, What does James mean here by "relation"? Distinguishing religious states from normal states by virtue of their object, as James already has, is a fundamentally relational judgment. What James implies here in his use of the term "relation," however, is something more important. That is, the religious objects to which one relates here do not purport to be merely subjective objects, like, say, a unicorn; rather, they must be objects to which one can consider one's complete *self* to stand in an external relation. James underscores this requirement in his discussion of the "godlike" object by mentioning the active character of Emerson's god and the cosmic, structural aspects of certain Buddhist conceptions (presumably of karma).[68] Thus while James's approach in *Varieties* is psychological, and therefore restricted to the sphere of thoughts and feelings, the object that "selects" the feelings or experiences under study, the object that determines them as religious – that object *itself* purports to go beyond the individual as a part of its content. Further, to be identified properly according to James, the religious individuals under study must themselves consider the determinative object of their religious emotion in fact to *go* beyond their individual selves.[69] This purported transcendency itself is part of the peculiarly distinctive character of religious emotion and experience. Psychology, James notes, admits of no way of

[65] See James, *Varieties*, p. 39. [66] See ibid., p. 41. [67] Ibid., p. 34. [68] Ibid., pp. 35, 34.
[69] See the discussion of James's concluding hypothesis for an analogous move in his own philosophical model.

affirming or denying this belief of the subject; this characteristic is nonetheless essential to identifying a particular state as religious from the psychological perspective. It is crucial to note, therefore, that even *qua* psychologist James does not seek to deny this extra-psychological claim of the religious individual.

Descriptions of the life of religion

Having laid out most of his methodological and hypothetical material in the first two lectures, James proceeds to his descriptive project, following the course dictated by the preceding determinations. In lecture 3 he sets out to describe the apparently ubiquitous religious recognition of the reality of an unseen order. Interestingly, he modulates quickly from description to explanation, attributing such a recognition to a modification of a general (biological) human capacity of sensation, which he, on apparent analogy to his own article "The Sentiment of Rationality," calls the "sentiment of reality."[70] "It is as if there were in the human consciousness a *sense of reality*," James writes:

> *a feeling of objective presence, a perception* of what we may call "*something there*," more deep and more general than any of the special and particular "senses" by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed.[71]

Whereas in "The Sentiment of Rationality" James had posited a psycho-physical dynamic by which the easy flow of thought gave rise to a peculiarly negative feeling, here he posits a "general" modification of the sensory apparatus, this time one that appears to be "objective." Several pages later, he notes that the data seem to "prove the existence in our mental machinery of a sense of present reality more diffused and general than that which our special senses yield."[72] Rather than pursuing the knotty problem of the organic root of such a sensation, potentially drawing a strong conclusion, James the descriptive psychologist tells us instead that he is only interested in "the faculty," that is, in the description of the phenomenon rather than the broader account

[70] James argued on psycho-physical grounds that the sentiment of rationality is a feeling of the sufficiency of the present moment, of its absoluteness, brought on by the ability to think with perfect fluency. The sentiment, insofar as it is a feeling of a *lack* of impediment, is internally caused but directly linked to the production of definite expectancy in thought and the consistency of such expectations with our other highly esteemed truths. See James, *Will to Believe*, pp. 57–8, 89.

[71] James, *Varieties*, p. 55. [72] Ibid., p. 59.

of it. While a hint of explanation is certainly in the air, such a question must apparently wait for his more philosophical treatment.

The narrative of the four lectures following "The Reality of the Unseen" turns from cataloging general characteristics of religion to considering instead the various types of religious individuals. James begins in lecture 4 with the terminally optimistic, those "once-born" (as opposed to born again, or "twice born"), healthy-minded souls for whom evil does not evoke the least sentiment of reality.[73] Their religion, he observes, is one of involuntary union with the divine; their sentiment is one of congenital happiness. From there, he proceeds to the once-born for whom evil has reality, exemplified by members of the mind-cure movement. These individuals admit a dualistic structure for human nature, associating each of the two parts with wider, corresponding systems.[74] Such once-born individuals conceive, however, of a voluntaristic means of uniting with the higher part and denying evil practical success. By virtue of their categorization, it goes without saying that these persons pursue such a goal successfully and systematically.

In contrast to these optimistic, once-born individuals who manage to procure happiness in their religious lives, James observes that there are also those with a differently constituted temperament, those with a sick soul for whom evil is not only real but dominant, and for whom voluntarism (James's will-to-believe doctrine) is ineffective or inadequate. This group splits into persons for whom evil is a maladjustment with *things*, who are ultimately curable, and those for whom evil is "radical and general, a wrongness or vice in [their] essential nature, which no alteration of the environment, or any superficial rearrangement of the inner self, can cure, and which requires a supernatural remedy."[75] Members of the latter group, if they are to be "cured" or set right, must be born again; they are thus, potentially, the twice-born.

Twice-born sick souls are, to James's eye, the most exemplary characters for developing an understanding of religious experience. Their lives are replete with the full range of human feeling and conception. They live in both of the religiously proposed worlds, and experience the maximal depths and heights possible in human feeling. Among these persons are the extreme cases who James thinks will yield the most insight into religion, both descriptively and philosophically. Thus in the final three lectures of the first course of ten, James considers the

[73] See ibid., p. 79. [74] Ibid., p. 86. [75] Ibid., p. 114.

process of rebirth – the dynamic of conversion – that characterizes these twice-born individuals.[76]

In the latter half of lecture 10 and the beginning of the second course, James overtly shifts the sights of his argument from describing the types of individuals who are the subjects of religious experiences to describing the fruits of these experiences for the lives of their subjects. It would appear, then, that he has turned right on cue at the beginning of his second course from existential to spiritual judgments. In a sense, that is the case: rather than just documenting the detailed pathology of experiences, he attempts after this transition to set the experiences of these individuals in the broader context of the whole of their lives, evaluating the practical effects of such experiences, and thus, according to the pragmatic principle, also specifying their spiritual meaning. However, contrary to expectation James's approach in the second set of lectures remains primarily descriptive. That is, although he does turn from the particular pathological moment to the whole of an individual's life as the unit to be described, he does not here take up the broader whole – the seen and the unseen order – indicated by those individuals' lives and experiences. James reserves the drawing of that most spiritual of judgments for brief discussion in his conclusions, having clearly set aside the writing of a philosophical study for another time.[77] Consequently, we should read the majority of the second course as a descriptive companion to the first course.

Corresponding to this overall program of looking descriptively at the fruits of religion, lectures 11–15 on "Saintliness" and "The Value of Saintliness" chronicle the inner conditions resultant on conversion, as well as correlate their practical consequences in the individuals' lives. James focuses on four conditions of saintliness, and their four correlative practical consequences. While this is consistent with the reader's expectations, particularly interesting is the fact that James goes out of his way in "The Value of Saintliness" to note the potential corruption of or excesses in these fruits of religion. These corruptions are, no doubt,

[76] See the next section for an-in depth treatment of James's account of the dynamic of conversion. It is worth noting that the sick-souled who are never converted drop out of *Varieties* from then on, their pathology having been fully described.

[77] See the beginning of lecture 20, where James characterizes all of the preceding lectures as composing the descriptive project. Although he does not state that he has made no spiritual judgments to this point, he does indicate that it is only by spiritual judgments that any theoretical and practical conclusions can be drawn, implying that he has, as yet, drawn none. See James, *Varieties*, p. 382.

empirically indicated. More important, though, is the fact that their possibility itself follows theoretically from James's notion that religious characteristics and states are, in fact, normal human states connected with a religious object. Given that such states have a "normal" constitution, they are also subject to the equally normal possibility of excess relative to other human needs and interests. Since James has adopted a frankly consequentialist method to establish the reality of religious experience in *Varieties* – not by their roots but their fruits – this endemic possibility of corruption raises serious problems for his project. He turns, therefore, from saintliness to an excursus on the question of the truth of religion.

Lectures 16–17 on mysticism and lecture 18 on philosophy are separate inquiries into whether there are means other than composite spiritual judgments (as discussed in the first lecture) of establishing the reality or truth of religion. From his knowledge of the history of religions, James sees two possible candidates: mysticism and philosophy (or rational theology). Mysticism, for its part, claims to offer a direct warrant for its noetic contents, while philosophy seeks to establish by wholly rational means an authoritative truth content for religion. James's much-quoted treatment of mysticism is characteristically descriptive, noting two principal and two minor marks of mystical experiences as a group (ineffability and noetic quality; transiency and passivity), and characterizing in general the philosophical drift of these experiences (to James's ultimate advantage, one might add).[78] His conclusion concerning the authority of mystical experience is, however, mixed: mystical experiences indeed prove subjectively authoritative; on the other hand, they pose no truth warrant for those who have not had them. The strongest conclusion one can draw from the noetic content (the philosophical drift) of a mystical experience, then, is that it suggests empirically (by its very existence) that the rational consciousness, based on sensation and the understanding alone, seems not to be the only kind of consciousness possible.[79] At the most, then, mystics offer the general public a set of additional hypotheses about the greater world as a whole to be tested in the process of experience, both mystical and non-mystical.

[78] James eventually retracts this characterization, noting that he was oversimplifying when he said that mystics were pantheistic, optimistic, anti-naturalistic, and in harmony with the twice-born thesis. See James, *Varieties*, p. 336.

[79] Ibid., p. 335.

In the first lecture of *Varieties* when James specified the two sorts of judgments involved in his study, he indicated two independent components constituting a spiritual judgment: immediate luminousness, primarily, and reasonableness and moral helpfulness, secondarily. With this distinction in mind, one can read his excursus into the truth question near the end of his Gifford Lectures as a preemptive rebuttal to anyone who claims that either of these components independently is adequate. When mysticism claims to offer truth, it does so purely by appeal to immediate luminousness, leaving the interests and needs of the understanding completely aside. Because of the privacy – the individuality – of feeling, however, mysticism can only be authoritative for its direct subjects, since it makes neither a rational attempt to conserve and extend our stock of truths nor a moral appeal to fulfill our needs.[80] Mysticism thus extends no warrant to the non-mystic; by extension, immediate luminousness alone cannot secure spiritual value or worth in the face of the existential ambiguity of the value of saintliness.

James's consideration of philosophy – or perhaps more aptly, rationalism – in the next lecture takes up the other extreme of the constitutive criteria of spiritual judgments: the adequacy of mere philosophical reasonableness and moral helpfulness without appeal to the concrete immediate luminousness of feeling.[81] Not surprisingly, James finds the wholly "philosophical" approach of rationalism – a priori philosophy – unsatisfactory to vouchsafe spiritual judgments about religion. This follows naturally, since if there are two inseparable components to spiritual judgments, and philosophy only appeals to one of them, like mysticism which appeals only to the other, philosophy too will fail. Yet where mysticism proved to be authoritative at least for the individual, on account of its noetic content "mediated" through feeling, philosophy taken exclusively proves absolutely wanting. "Feeling is the deeper source of religion," James writes, and "philosophical and theological formulas are secondary products."[82] Mysticism, then, at least provides for feeling, putting the individual on the primary plane of religion and supplying immediate luminousness. Philosophy, beginning empty-handed at the secondary level, alone cannot provide any satisfaction.

80 See ibid., p. 23.
81 It is crucial to observe that James has no stake in the definition of philosophy offered here, preferring to cede the mantle to his rationalistic opponents. Again, this proves a particularly effective rhetorical strategy.
82 James, *Varieties*, p. 341.

Although it looks as if James is proposing a simplistic, "expressive" model of theological and religious propositions, the relationship he has in mind in this analysis is more complicated. "When I call theological formulas secondary products," he writes, "I mean that in a world in which no religious feeling had ever existed, I doubt whether any philosophic theology could ever have been framed."[83] Philosophy, then, need not "directly" express religious experience, although it does take such experience as its data. As James characterizes it here, the goal of philosophy is to redeem religion from "unwholesome privacy, and to give public status and universal right of way to its deliverances."[84] In short, philosophy seeks to systematize religion wholly according to the criteria of reasonableness and moral helpfulness, bringing together in an acceptable rational form that which otherwise appears so individual, separate, and at odds in its concrete experiential moment. On this view, then, it is not impossible for a philosopher or theologian adequately to provide the systematic elements that would be satisfactory to the experiences had by others. Philosophy, then, is not deemed lacking by James simply because it is not, by definition, feeling.

James's ultimate objection to philosophy arises not because rationalistic theology cannot account for some of the facts.[85] Nor does it arise merely because it is thought- or conception-based. Instead, James objects to the systems of philosophical or rational theology from the perspective of their own aims and criteria:

> [Has the philosopher] transcended the sphere of feeling and of the direct experience of the individual, and laid the foundation of religion in impartial reason? Has he made religion universal by coercive reasoning, transformed it from a private faith into a public certainty? Has he rescued its affirmations from obscurity and mystery? I believe that he has done nothing of the kind.[86]

Philosophy thus fails in attaining its desideratum of philosophical reasonableness – it fails to produce a unified account of both religious experience and our stock of truths. In point of fact, James observes, the practice of philosophy leads to schools and sects (analogous to the irreducible differences and variations in feeling in religious experience) rather than proceeding toward one system. This proves that even philosophers as a group cannot (and do not) regard their own efforts

83 Ibid., p. 341. 84 Ibid., p. 341.

85 Of Principal Caird's account, James writes, "You will readily admit that no description of the phenomena of the religious consciousness could be better . . . They reproduce the very rapture of those crises of conversion," *Varieties*, p. 357.

86 Ibid., p. 358.

as proving philosophically reasonable; philosophy, then, fails in producing its own rational fruits.[87] As if this were not enough, a second critique emerges because rationalistic theology's productions also do not prove to be morally helpful. With the exception of the moral attributes of God (for example, holiness, justice, love), James finds that rational theology's productions – such as establishing God's aseity, simplicity, or immateriality – prove pragmatically meaningless. The moral attributes, positive though they are, are also ultimately unhelpful when practically considered. Although they determine hope and expectation for the believer, James finds that in point of fact they have never actually led anyone who seriously doubted into believing.[88] Thus they, too, offer no sure path to religion. In short, then, where mysticism at least provides a private warrant for the individual, philosophy taken by itself (without independent, concrete religious feeling) offers no warrant whatsoever. The most philosophy as a practice could (and should) do, then, is to leave behind its a priori methods and transform itself into the steward of empiricism, founding a science of religions that seeks to categorize and organize knowledge of religious phenomena as far as the concrete facts allow.[89] As for providing an actual warrant for the truth of religion, much less producing religious experience, on James's view philosophy on its own has nothing to offer religion.

Upon concluding the lecture on philosophy, James has exhausted his examination of how positive judgments of religion might satisfactorily be secured based on then current understandings. Both an existential consideration of religion's fruits (the value of saintliness) and an exclusive appeal to either mere feeling or mere reason (mysticism or rationalism respectively) have failed in vouchsafing a positive spiritual valuation for religion. Finding himself in this cul-de-sac, James turns back to his descriptive project for one more lecture, surveying several details he has omitted before launching into his own composite spiritual judgments of religion. Lecture 19, appropriately titled "Other Characteristics," is thus a hodgepodge of familiar topics in the study of religion. James mentions the aesthetic life of religion, sacrifice, confession, prayer, and inspiration, dwelling most intently on prayer (which is substantively connected to his account of conversion and the resolution of the divided self). Prayer, understood as "every kind of inward communion

[87] Ibid., p. 344.
[88] James provides no evidence for this, and demands to be taken at his word. He is as always subject here to empirical falsification.
[89] James, *Varieties*, p. 359.

or conversation with the power recognized as divine," is "the very soul and essence of religion." "Prayer is religion in act; that is, prayer is real religion," he concludes.[90] Thus for James, prayer is the most general term for the phenomenon of religion considered from the perspective of the individual, taking in both conversion and mysticism, and itself encompassing James's own circumscription as well as his descriptive project within *Varieties*. Given that James values individual religious experience so highly, what remains to be considered is his *explanation* or account of religion, his metaphysical or philosophical attempt at including from the widest vantage all that he has considered. Large though such a task seems, in lieu of the promised ten lectures on the subject James's readers must, however, be content with the limited comments he has made along the way and his summary presentation in the concluding lecture.

JAMES'S MODEL OF RELIGION IN ACT

In the conclusions to his Gifford Lectures James sets out to do two things. First, he summarizes and states generally the prominent features of religion as he has found them, casting a selective eye over the preceding lectures and proposing a final description of religion as a refinement of his descriptive hypothesis in his circumscription. Second, and more important, in the final lecture James offers his own hypothesis about what philosophically and metaphysically the phenomena of religion can be said to indicate. This second project grows out of and is related to the first; however, it is distinguished from the first by leaving behind the narrower, "special science" perspective of psychology, speaking instead from the rostrum of metaphysics, which, for James, seeks the widest comprehension of the totality of life. In this latter view, then, he elaborates his philosophical understanding of the objectivity of religion and what it means for our understanding of the world.

James's descriptive summation (the first part of the conclusions) reduces the religious life to three beliefs and two resultant psychological characteristics. The religious life involves the beliefs that: (1) there is an unseen world that is the ground of significance for the seen world; (2) harmonious relation with that "higher" order is our true end; and (3) this harmonious relation, broadly called prayer, produces real effects

[90] Ibid., pp. 365–6.

in the visible world. In addition to such intellectual content, the religious life also manifests two salient psychological characteristics or feelings: (1) a new zest in life; and (2) an assurance of safety, a temper of peace, and loving affection toward others, all of which make up a general demeanor.[91]

Such is the content of the religious life described from the psychological perspective – the objective facts about the human subjects of religion. These, then, are James's most general existential judgments concerning religion. What, however, of the spiritual judgment of religion? Can these psychological facts be taken as evidence for the beliefs indicated?[92] If so, what would this mean for an understanding of the world generally? In the conclusions James turns directly to the problem of drawing a spiritual judgment of the value of the religious life. More importantly, he also turns to the broadest of related spiritual judgments – the metaphysical question of how, given the content of the religious life and claims to value, we can account for religion in anything but a subjective fashion. From a relatively narrow psychological perspective, religion can indeed be "spiritually judged" as valuable on the whole (though this need not be true in every case). Yet the very content of the religious life itself denies (or more accurately transcends) the narrow bounds of psychology as a special science from which this admittedly positive judgment is made. That is, religion in its distinctive content claims that there is a realm beyond either of those recognized by psychology (the mind and the brain). Further, religion claims that it is precisely this realm with which the religious have commerce. In making such a claim, then, religion demands a hearing in the forum of metaphysics, since it challenges directly the presuppositions of the natural sciences in general and psychology in particular that have heretofore provided for the limited spiritual estimation of religion.

When James turns to this metaphysical forum in the middle of his conclusions, he brings with him the basic methodological framework he presented in the opening lectures. That is, he continues to operate as an empiricist of the radical sort, considering experience – however outlandish it might be – as something to be accounted for in every concrete instance, while also recognizing both the claims of rationality and the practical weight of culturally recognized truths. As a result of this methodological posture, neither the facts of the religious life nor the presuppositions of the special sciences can be dismissed out of

[91] Ibid., pp. 382–3. [92] Ibid., p. 384.

hand, for the practical effects and successes respectively of each grant credence. James is therefore left with the difficult task of accounting theoretically for two apparently contradictory results. On the one hand, dualistic, reductive natural science is successful in its self-determined, limited task of explaining the possible origins of religious phenomena; on the other hand, the supernatural claims of religion (which appear directly excluded by such a natural-science perspective) must be understood to coincide with real, practical fruits. Anticipating slightly, James's general response to this problematic is to advance and defend a form of supernaturalism as compatible with both science and religion.[93] His "crass" or "piecemeal" supernaturalism in the conclusions and the epilogue, then, should be read as an attempt at a metaphysically pluralistic accommodation of both science and religion, retaining the empirical facts and successes of each, while renegotiating the mutually exclusive grounds of their apparently contradictory presuppositions.

Assuming this radically (or pluralistically) empiricist perspective in his conclusions, James begins his theoretical account encompassing both religion and psychology with the radically empiricist-sounding observation that "the world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part." Although we may isolate these one from another by virtue of our powers of attention (science attending to the objective, religion to the subjective), a "concrete bit of personal experience," a "*full* fact," involves both elements: "A conscious field *plus* its object as felt or thought of *plus* an attitude towards the object *plus* the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs."[94] Although James's interest is no doubt to be inclusive, the emphasis in this quotation is clearly on the subjective side of a concrete bit of experience, almost to the exclusion of the objective. Emphasizing the limits of the objective perspective, James goes on to say that "the inner state is our very experience itself," thus ignoring science's defining aspiration to describe an intersubjective reality. How, then, can we read this analysis as encompassing both science and religion?

Context here is a useful informant. Although the several lectures preceding James's conclusions had rationalistic theology (or philosophy) as their principal opponent, near the beginning of lecture 20 James had vowed to defend supernaturalism against naturalism, thus reinvoking the materialism/science question from his inaugural lecture.[95] Given this context, it is plausible to read James in his conclusions as rhetorically

[93] Ibid., pp. 384, 410. [94] Ibid., p. 393. [95] Ibid., p. 384.

engaging once again the materialists with whom he opened his methodological discussions in lecture 1, rather than the rationalists who have occupied his attention in lectures 2–19. The subjective aspects of experience are thus overemphasized here in part because James is objecting to the (scientific) materialist's judgment that thought and feeling are merely epiphenomenal to reality. As the objective characteristics of religion emerge, on James's view, only through their initial subjective determinations as feeling, then religion, insofar as it is a fact, demands solid, non-reductive recognition of the subjective side of experience in terms of both origin and purpose. This, however, is in direct conflict with the assumed "objective" origin of the data of (materialistic) natural science, even those of James's psychology (on the psycho-physical thesis).

"The world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part," James writes. By "subjective" James means the view from the perspective of the subject, a view available to psychological description. This first split into the "subjective" and "objective" components of the world is not the only division, however. Since psychology concerns itself on the mental side with feelings and thoughts, the subjective side of religion can be expected potentially to have both a sensible and an intellectual content. With regard to the sensible side, James ultimately finds from his investigations that feeling must be admitted to be the basis of all religion. Also from his research, James concludes further that this feeling is similar in all religious experience insofar as it is a sort of "faith-state" with determinate biological and psychological effects. Interestingly, these sensible effects function both biologically and psychologically: biologically, they act as either stimulant or anaesthetic; psychologically, they promote love of life.[96]

Still considering religion subjectively but now taking up the intellectual side, James also finds that religion can be said everywhere to involve a common idea, particular variations of belief notwithstanding. Broadly construed, this involves both the acknowledgment of an uneasiness – the recognition that "there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand" – and the assertion of a solution, namely, "that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connexion with the higher powers."[97] This intellectual content is doubtless dependent somehow on the feeling(s) productive of religion; nonetheless James finds it universally in some determinate form.

[96] Ibid., pp. 397–9. [97] Ibid., p. 400.

As yet, James's summation treats religion only subjectively, considering it exclusively within parameters wholly acceptable to dualistic psychology as a natural science. What about the other question he raises from the outset, the question of the objective validity of religion? Are the claims of religion *true* concerning the reality of the unseen, the natural wrongness of the human being, and the reparation of this through connection with the powers of the unseen order? It is critical to note that once this question is posed, one has transgressed the boundary of psychology as a special science and raised a metaphysical query about the objective character of the world of experience itself. That is, one puts into play the presuppositions of psychology itself, since the objective aspect of religion directly questions the very validity of materialistic natural science (as James's psychology admittedly is). Because metaphysics is, for James, the broadest possible forum of thought, in responding to such a question, it is incumbent on him to provide an answer that not only fits the facts of his investigations into religion, but also satisfies rationality by accommodating the facts of all the other special sciences and areas of human inquiry as well. This task so casually posed, then, is of no small order intellectually. Beginning his response, James recognizes the challenge, appealing implicitly also to what he had previously defined as the sentiment of rationality. "The most I can do," he writes, "is . . . offer something that may fit the facts so easily that your scientific logic will find no plausible pretext for vetoing your impulse to welcome it as true."[98]

The facts, so far as James has presented them, are subjective facts: that is, they are feelings and beliefs that relate to (and derive from, James thinks) the particular religious feelings found within the individual. Although these beliefs and feelings point beyond the widest possible object of psychological investigation – the individual – and thus suggest psychology's inadequacy to the task, it is still possible that psychology as a natural science might be reconceived in a way that accommodates the religious facts without prejudice to the truth or falsity of the beliefs (or the reality of the objects) in question. If successful, this would fulfill the inquirer's metaphysical obligation to operate with rationally acceptable and consistent presuppositions. Since James himself had offered such a reconception of psychology in his discussion of conversion in lectures 9 and 10, it would be fruitful to consider that proposal more closely.

[98] Ibid., p. 402.

In the two final lectures of his first course of Giffords, James presented a theoretical analysis of the psychological phenomenon of conversion. He introduces his description of this view in lecture 9 as if it is standard associationist fare, even though the only particularity that his view shares with the otherwise materialistic associationism is its basic recognition of the complexity of mental states (the idea that elements combine to form the mental state). Calling his analysis the "field" model of consciousness, he even goes so far as to comment that such an expression has become common in the psychology books.[99] From my analysis of James's 1895–6 psychology seminar in chapter 2, however, it is clear that the view James has in mind is his own. It is likely, then, that the attribution to associationism is for rhetorical advantage.

The presentation of the field theory in *Varieties* is substantively similar to the 1895–6 analysis, in that James exploits the spatial distinctions of the field's center and margins as a means of accounting for dynamic psychical change – in this case transformation or conversion. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two discussions: where in 1895–6 James was exploring a formally monistic analysis, in *Varieties* James restricts himself, at least overtly, to the parameters of (his own) dualistic psychology. Thus his rendering of the field theory in *Varieties* appears to be merely psychological, wholly subjective – all in the mind, we might say – as opposed to the metaphysically monistic, and thus partially objectivist, phenomenism of the 1895–6 account.

The account in *Varieties* has several interesting differences of detail or nuance that appear to derive from the religious subject matter under study, such as the designation of centers or ideas by their emotional energy – the description of hot and cold ideas and beliefs. The principal substantive addition that was not present in the 1895–6 account, however, is James's postulation, following F. W. H. Myers, of a subliminal or subconscious region of the mind in which cerebration (mental work) actually occurs, unbeknownst to the conscious mind.[100] This postulation is required by the data, James thinks, since those "converted" individuals who are unable to reorder their divided selves through a will-to-believe voluntarism must, nonetheless, be scientifically

[99] That is, the expression "field of consciousness." See James, *Varieties*, p. 188. James mentions "field" first in lecture 9, speaking of the associationist model (Humean or Buddhist!) as involving "a succession of fields of consciousness." See pp. 161–2. Note also that James's view develops dramatically over the two lectures. I am treating the two discussions together for the purposes of this analysis.

[100] James, *Varieties*, pp. 163, 170.

explained. Something significant happens to (or within) these individuals independent of their consciousness. The supposition of a subliminal region – literally below the threshold – of consciousness where mental work can be done but not "seen" thus provides James with a means within the closed psychological system of accounting for such sudden changes or transformations in the habitual center of a person's energy or conscious field.[101]

If we compare the psychological account of conversion in *Varieties* with the field theory discussion of 1895–6, it is evident that the differences in the premises of the two discussions account for their divergence in describing the non-central area of the field of consciousness. In 1895–6 James was explicitly pursuing a formally monistic phenomenism that sought to make no distinction in kind between thoughts and things, subjects and objects. Consequently, the field of consciousness there was literally unbounded, fading into a marginal region that included everything in the world ejective to (independent of) the subject or center of the field. By contrast, in *Varieties* James assumes his own well-known persona from *Principles*, taking the commonly accepted, natural-science approach. Overtly, then, in *Varieties* James has readopted the commonplace metaphysical dualism of subject and object, mind and body/matter, notwithstanding his rejection of it in his 1894 address. When he invokes the field theory in lectures 9 and 10, then, he must reformulate it according to the standard split. Accordingly, the margins that in 1895–6 led to the rest of the ejective and objective worlds here can only lead to the rest of the subject. To account for involuntary transformation, James resorts to a part of the subject not "in view" from the center as the best means to an explanation. Myers's conception of the subliminal, then, stands in dynamically for the work achieved by the 1895–6 margins relative to the center.

James's dualistic adaptation of the field theory carries an important consequence with respect to the "margin" conception: namely, the idea of a strict and exclusive boundary between the subject and the objective (and ejective) world that (somehow) presents itself to sensation. Where the margin in 1895–6 was indeterminate, fading amorphously, on *Varieties*' exclusively subjective field model, the margin is simply the line (or space) of demarcation between the conscious center of the subjective field and the subliminal region that lies beyond its

101 Cf. James's comment about the hackneyed symbolism of an equilibrium model in psychology, ibid., p. 161.

immediate view. Notably, the ejective sphere that is in the margins in the 1895–6 account, making up the rest of the world, is nowhere to be found in the initial *Varieties* account.

Having invoked this purely subjective version of the field theory and its notion of the subliminal (though as yet without the detail on the margins that I have specified), near the end of lecture 9 James remarks that psychology and religion at this point appear to be in perfect harmony, in that "both admit that there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life."[102] Nevertheless, since psychology puts a great deal of weight on the "seemingly" and the "conscious" by defining the forces as subliminal, it diverges significantly from the account that religion gives, which insists that such transformations are the operations of a supernatural power. Noting this discrepancy, James opines that perhaps this particular discord between religious thought and psychology need not stand ultimately.[103] He does not elaborate, however, turning from theory back to more conversion case studies.

In the middle of lecture 10, "Conversion – Concluded," James returns from his case narrations to the field theory and the subliminal. In this second treatment he begins with a complex of questions of critical interest to religion and psychology. Is an instantaneous conversion (which he has just discussed) a miracle in which God is present? he asks. And are there two classes of persons, the members of one susceptible to such transformation and the others, not? Or is conversion instead a "strictly natural process, divine in its fruits"?[104] In these questions we can see James broach the existential questions of the origin of conversion (divine or natural) and the nature of conversion subjects (one or two classes), as well as the spiritual judgment of the value of conversion (whether it is divine in its fruits).

To the existential question of classes, James summarizes his data and finds that there appear to be "constitutional differences" with respect to the scope of the normal field of consciousness and variations in the amount of subliminal activity encountered. To illuminate this further, he draws an analogy to his psychical research, noting that in persons with automatisms (for example, automatic writing), one must assume a great deal of subliminal or "extra-marginal" activity in order

[102] Ibid., p. 174. [103] Ibid., p. 174.
[104] Ibid., p. 188. The questions are actually interwoven in the text, not appearing exactly in this form or order.

to arrive at an explanation of the phenomenon.[105] Interestingly, while this might suggest that James is leaning toward a positive answer to the two classes question, he hypothesizes instead that we all share uniform *elementary* mental mechanisms, thus implying that variations in their function or development account for widely differing actual experiences. On the psychical phenomena analogy, then, if there are indeed two psychological classes of conversion subjects, they differ not ultimately in kind or nature, but rather by virtue of their magnitude of development.[106]

Just before concluding lecture 10 and completing his first course of lectures, James revisits the two classes question, summarizing that "if the subject have no liability to subconscious activity, or if his conscious fields have a hard rind of a margin that resists incursions from beyond it," his conversion must be gradual. If, however, another individual possesses "a developed subliminal self," and "a leaky or pervious margin," then instantaneous conversion can be expected if any transformation occurs at all.[107] Despite human beings' elementary uniformity, then, there are two *functionally* differentiable classes of persons from psychology's perspective, one whose subjects can be transformed instantaneously, and the other whose members can change only gradually. Psychology, then, has no difficulty accounting meaningfully for the variations in conversion accounts.

James's treatment of the other two questions, the existential question of natural or divine origin and the question of conversion's fruits for life, is telling of his problem in having assumed the stance of psychology in considering religion. Although James in lecture 10 generally seeks to modify psychology's account by supposing the subliminal, thus allowing himself fully to describe and explain conversion in concert with religion's accounts, when faced with the origin question he is confounded. From the standpoint of religion, conversion's origin derives from the deity; from that of psychology, however, there can be no question that it must be natural, given the psycho-physical principle. The response given by James as a psychologist of religion to the question of conversion's origin is, then, foregone at this point, given that psychology – his only theoretical framework to this point – has no conceptual tools with which it could recognize anything but the natural. In lieu of answering the question of origin, James turns to the spiritual

[105] Ibid., p. 190. Note that the parallel between psychic phenomena and religious experience is consistent with the "normal-character" specification of religious emotions.

[106] Ibid., p. 191. [107] Ibid., p. 197.

question of value, offering up a "religious" version of naturalism according to which, whatever might be said about the "truth" of the object by which religious persons claim to be transformed, "if the *fruits for life* of the state of conversion are good, we ought to idealize and venerate it, even though it be a piece of natural psychology."[108] Relying on his separation of value from origin from his first lecture, then, James suggests for the present that religious persons might content themselves with the offerings of such a naturalism.

But what of the existential, factual question of the real presence of the deity? Even though at this point in the lectures James has neither empirical nor theoretical grounds from which to contend, is that the end of the matter? Although he cannot honestly defend the religious view here, he does seize the opportunity to advance an hypothesis concerning the ultimate status of the existential question, in opposition to his "psychological" answer. He suggests that, in the same manner that psychology as a natural science cannot account for the existence (much less the dynamic sensation) of everyday objects in the world that psychology assumes in treating our consciousness, so too may it be with religion and the unseen order. "But just as our primary wide-awake consciousness throws open our senses to the touch of things material," James writes,

> so it is logically conceivable that *if there be* higher spiritual agencies that can directly touch us, the psychological condition of their doing so *might be* our possession of a subconscious region which alone should yield access to them. The hubbub of the waking life might close a door which in the dreamy Subliminal might remain ajar or open.
>
> Thus that perception of external control which is so essential a feature in conversion might, in some cases at any rate, be interpreted as the orthodox interpret it: forces transcending the finite individual might impress him, on condition of his being what we may call a subliminal human specimen.[109]

That is, the subliminal might be to religious experience (conversion) and the spiritual realm as consciousness is to sensation and the material world: namely, the function (in both cases) that provides access or egress to an "other" world which psychology only assumes rather than explains. Psychology's description of the subjective phenomenon of conversion would, then, be basically correct for religion as well, with the exception of its assumption concerning the *origin* of the experience. From the perspective of natural-science psychology, which only admits

[108] Ibid., p. 193. [109] Ibid., p. 197.

the subliminal as a hidden extension of the conscious realm, religious forces can still be none other than subjective forces (or, by extension, their material correspondents). Religion and such a psychology, then, must remain at odds in their conclusions about the supernatural or divine, since psychology as James presents it is founded precisely on an exclusive, reductive naturalism which is in direct conflict with religion's claims.

While this appears to leave religion at a fundamental disadvantage, James does hold out for a critical non-reductive claim at this point. Religion and psychology are, he concludes, in no *logical* contradiction here, since they are not working from the same presuppositions; rather, they are in what we might call "metaphysical" contradiction. That is, their primary, constitutive assumptions are in conflict, not their existential descriptions of the "subjective" facts. Psychology's naturalism might in fact be correct, but one could not determine that from within the special science of psychology so constituted. Religion, then, has a limited reprieve theoretically. Given his stated descriptive purposes for the lectures, and having held out this slim hope for religion, James lets the issue drop until his concluding lecture.

Turning to lecture 20, it is clear now that when James raises the objective question of the truth of religion, he is in fact returning to his query of lecture 10 concerning the real presence of the deity. In the conclusions he repeats his accommodation between religion and psychology, this time leaning slightly closer to religion's side. "Let me then propose, as an hypothesis," he writes, "that whatever it may be on its *farther* side, the 'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life."[110] This, James thinks, is the strongest statement of the objective *truth* of religion to which an empirical (naturalistic) psychologist can assent.

Although he is at the limits of his psychological conscience, James musters one more comment about religious experience under these parameters of "objective truth," finding that, over-beliefs aside, "we have in *the fact that the conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which saving experiences come*, a positive content of religious experience which, it seems to me, *is literally and objectively true as far as it goes*."[111] This phrase is one of the most frequently quoted – and also one of the most difficult to interpret – statements in the text. Given the context of the

[110] Ibid., p. 403. [111] Ibid., p. 405.

"objective" question, the wider self to which James refers here does not necessarily appear to be a wider self inclusive of different human selves in the panpsychist or transcendentalist way one might initially think. Given lecture 10, it seems instead that it might be the wider self rendered solipsistically, the wider self of a single individual – the sum total of that individual's subliminal and conscious components or aspects "on its hither side." Saving experiences may come from this wider, subliminal self to the conscious center of its field, but as yet in these conclusions, it is not clear that James has in any sense abandoned his restriction to the dualistic presuppositions of psychology with which he began the lectures.[112]

In the last three pages of his final lecture, James does finally drop his dualistic natural-science posture, offering in its stead his own over-belief, a belief that exceeds the realm even of his mediating hypothesis about the subliminal dynamic of conversion within dualistic parameters. In place of this he offers a truly metaphysical view, one of broad scope seeking, as he put it in 1892, the maximal possible insight into the world as a whole.[113] Presuming that his view is a form of radical empiricism, we should expect that such a position cannot ignore the empirical findings of the individual special sciences. Rather, it should seek to bring them into a higher unity, resolving their disputes with one another through adjusting their shared or conflicting presuppositions. James's proposal promises to do just this.

The crux of James's metaphysical over-belief, which in the postscript he calls "crasser" or "piecemeal" supernaturalism, is his assertion in the conclusions that "the farther limits of our being plunge . . . into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely 'understandable' world."[114] Echoing his lecture on the reality of the unseen, James implies that there is another realm of real existence not

[112] This passage is complicated to interpret, as it is transitional between the psychological investigation and the realm of over-beliefs. James writes two pages earlier that the "higher faculties of our own hidden mind . . . are controlling," afterward stating that this doorway into the subject seems to be the best one for a science of religions. Introducing the "wider self" quotation, James begins by saying, "Disregarding the over-beliefs, and confining ourselves to what is common and generic," placing himself squarely within this science of religions framework, and thus within the psychological sphere. The footnote to the "wider self" passage quoting Brownell is, however, ambiguous, drawing an analogy between the reality of electromagnetism and that of the holy spirit. Electromagnetism is not a thing, but a "force" among things, constituted through their relations. See James, *Varieties*, pp. 403, 405, and 405 n. 30. See also the reconstrual of this passage in the section on superhuman consciousness in chapter 4.

[113] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 396.

[114] James, *Varieties*, p. 406.

suited to analysis through our "specialized" powers of sensation and understanding, or conscious knowing. Far from being distant or removed from us, however, this world is the most intimate and meaningful for us, insofar as it is both the origin and the end of our ideals, the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem*, as James might say in 1904, for our lives.

This farther limit of our being which James advances is not merely ideal in its intimacy, however, for it can be seen empirically to have real, concrete effects within the worlds normally accessible to sense and understanding. These effects may begin subjectively, that is, from within our consciousnesses, but they eventually manifest themselves objectively and thus can be corroborated as the fruits of religion. On pragmatic principles, since "that which produces real effects within another reality must be termed a reality itself," this unseen dimension, James thinks, cannot be dismissed out of hand as wholly unreal.[115] Rather, its degree of reality must be probed and established. Taking this pragmatic notion further, James elaborates that for an hypothesis generally to be *real*, that is, to have value and meaning *of itself* (independently of its subjective character), that hypothesis must not only account for the facts but must extend knowledge (and the world) further through becoming prolific. Concerning his own hypothesis about religion James finds correspondingly that:

> Religion, in her fullest exercise of function, is not a mere illumination of facts already elsewhere given, not a mere passion, like love, which views things in a rosier light. It is indeed that, as we have seen abundantly. But it is something more, namely a postulator of new *facts* as well. The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, *a natural constitution* different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have.[116]

This recasting of our understanding of the whole natural/supernatural complex, James thinks, is what the facts of religious experience, treated pragmatically, require; otherwise they have no *real* meaning whatsoever, but are merely ideal. His broadest spiritual judgment of the facts of religion, existentially gathered, thus yields the empirical and metaphysical hypothesis of piecemeal, or pluralistic, supernaturalism.

VARIETIES AND RADICAL EMPIRICISM

Looking broadly over the twenty lectures comprising *Varieties*, one can see that James is basically truthful in his comment to Schiller that the

[115] Ibid., p. 406. [116] Ibid., pp. 407–8.

book is "all facts and no philosophy." Until the very last pages James has measured his conclusions according to his presupposed vantage of dualistic psychology. This does not imply, however, that he has nothing else in mind in *Varieties*, particularly in light of the final hypothesis of his piecemeal supernaturalism. Given the strength of his public statements in 1895 against dualism, the radically empiricist character of the plan for the philosophical course, and the similarity of the field model in 1895–6 to that of the account of conversion in *Varieties*, a radical empiricist reading of his accounts in the Gifford Lectures seems highly plausible, if not textually mandated. In what follows, I trace the basic outline of the import of James's final over-belief for such a rereading of *Varieties*, leaving an in-depth consideration of his final view on religion for the treatment in chapter 4 of James's published Hibbert Lectures, *A Pluralistic Universe*.

One of the critical conclusions that James implies both in lecture 10 and his conclusions and postscript is that the dualistic psychological project he has pursued in *Varieties* is ultimately inadequate to the full depth of the facts. This is not to say that such an analysis is unable to offer a description adequate in some sense to the facts; on the contrary, given the subliminal, psychology is quite competent on this score. The real criticism is that psychology's specific assumptions, interests, and aims as a special science – its goal of description and correlation, and the scope of its objects – are inadequate to the facts of religion.

Psychology as a natural science seeks to describe states of mind and correlate them with brain states that are taken to be their condition.[117] As such a special science, psychology has no pretension to describe anything that goes beyond the single individual: for all intents and purposes, this psychology presumes a methodological solipsism. In the conclusions to *Briefer Course* as well as in *Varieties*, James indicates that he is dissatisfied with such a perspective because, among other reasons, it provides no account of the process of sensation that is assumed to be the "mechanism" of relation between the two supposed realms, the physical and the mental. Psychology proves inadequate, then, because it operates without an account of its basic datum, i.e., the relation between brain states and mental states. Mental states as objects point beyond themselves, but the "how" of that pointing is left obscured.

To James's mind religion poses the same problem as do intentional mental objects. Treated psychologically, religious states themselves claim

[117] See chapter 2.

to transcend, or point to, something beyond the mental or biological sphere that is their condition. However, whereas in psychology the beyond is not necessarily more important than the correlative mental state (though it is usually assumed to be so), the content of religious experience postulates a spiritual judgment concerning the relative value of these two "objects," with the region pointed to proving more worthy than the resultant mental state. Where psychology causes a certain discomfort on account of its lack of an account for its basic presuppositions, the spiritual judgment internal to religion raises this discomfort to a fever pitch.

Dualistic psychology's failure to account for its presuppositions is enough for James to recant his own dualism publicly to the American Psychological Association in 1895; no wonder he indicates a move in the same direction in the suggestive philosophical conclusions of *Varieties*. Pursuing this parallel further, one can suppose that, since the problem of religion vis-à-vis psychology is a more extreme case of the same issue of "self-transcendency," the solution James looks to in the closing pages of *Varieties* should be a similar, though more extreme, version of the solution he pursues for psychology. That is exactly what is suggested by his comments about "another dimension" and his invocation of the field theory in his discussion of conversion.

Taking this analogy further, to explore the import of James's "real hypothesis" at the end of *Varieties*, one need only strip the account in the earlier lectures of the restrictions that derive from the standard methodology of psychology as a natural science, replacing them with James's radically empiricist proposals of 1895. Thus instead of treating only mental facts within a self-contained "mind," separate from other minds and the world, one should think along formally monistic lines, assuming something like the thesis of pure experience. On this view thought and thing are taken to be metaphysically similar, insofar as they can both be experienced, with the pluralistic caveat that they vary beyond this according to their own contents and contexts.

In addition to this methodological and metaphysical alteration, one must also explicitly grant what psychology and religion both implicitly do grant: namely, that relations among the basic elements admitted are factual and real, as real as anything else in the system.[118] Admitting

[118] Psychology grants this in the psycho-physical thesis. Interestingly, James's explanation of spiritual judgments, as well as his emphasis on their priority, relies on precisely this claim, since the spiritual judgment requires prescinding from the individual element and considering it in relation to the whole. The relation proves more important than, though never absolutely exclusive of, the content of any particular experience.

further that knowing in its various forms is just a realization (or dynamic enactment) of certain of these (extant or potential) experiential relations, one is in a position to reconsider the status of religion metaphysically, as well as its claims to be true.

In discussing the field theory above, I argued that James significantly modifies the model in *Varieties* relative to his 1895–6 discussion in order to stay within the bounds of standard psychological dualism and its presupposition of solipsism (or the fully self-contained individual). James thus introduces the subliminal to provide a location for spontaneous transformation to occur out of view of the subjective center. The margins, which in 1895–6 faded into the whole ejective world, become here a barrier between the subliminal realm of the individual and the conscious center. Reading *Varieties* from the perspective of James's radical empiricism, however, one has to speak of an "outer" margin to the subliminal as well, a margin that fades into the "other dimension" of the higher (and also, potentially, lower) order with which we may connect ourselves, and through which saving (and presumably damning) experiences may come. The leaky or pervious margin between the conscious center and the subliminal would also be mirrored by a leaky or pervious margin between the bounds of the individual and the higher order, or the now metaphysically rendered wider self.[119] On this view, the subliminal would still be an involved mechanism of interaction, but instead of presuming "unconscious cerebration" (whatever that vague term might mean) as the cause of the dynamic, one would assume the possibility of causal origins in the ejective margins to the subliminal. Via such a dynamic, the "transmundane energies, God, if you will, [would] produce . . . immediate effects within the natural world to which the rest of our experience belongs," as James writes in the postscript.[120]

The language of another dimension that James introduces in lecture 20 is very instructive here. In the 1895 discussion, the mental/physical distinction is recognized as a real – although not fundamental – difference among certain of our experiences. This distinction is determined by how (or the manner in which), on the one hand, experiences present themselves to sensation, and on the other hand, how they act in relation to other experiences. By such differentiations, experiences or field

[119] This is directly analogous to the fading of the margin to the ejective world in the 1895–6 version of the field theory.

[120] James, *Varieties*, p. 412.

contents are eventually sorted out into two separate groups of associates, corresponding to the subjective and objective worlds, or the mental and the physical. Likewise, each of these groups of associates has a primary, though not exclusive, "place" within the field theory: the objective in the margins, and the subjective in the center. By mentioning another dimension in the conclusions, James seems to be indicating that there is a third region of the field and, correspondingly, a third group of associates. This third region spatially would be the margin between the subliminal and the ejective realm (and not the margin between the subliminal and the center, which is still intra-subjective), and the corresponding group of associates would be those supernatural objects whose experiences report their ejectivity, or "out-thereness." The extra dimension, then, is the dimension that piecemeal supernaturalism takes religious experience (and some psychical phenomena) to suggest in addition to the regular two dimensions (and the religious effects within them) supposed by naturalism.

James also hints in *Varieties* that there is a biological analogue to the extramarginal metaphysical picture, much as the five sensory organs provide a biological analogue to the supposed commerce between the physical and mental associates of experience (which dualistic psychology does not explain but rather presumes). This biological analogue is seen primarily in lecture 3, where James suggests that beyond the special senses that provide biologically for commerce between the physical and mental associates, there seems to be a *general* modification of the sensory network in religious experience, one which yields less concrete data but nonetheless proves specific regarding the presence of something ejective or independent of the individual.[121] Thus in addition to a third dimension of experience, he indicates a corresponding biological function, a general sensibility toward the unseen dimension.

In proposing such a reading of James's over-belief back onto his discussion of religious experience, it is important to underscore the empirical warrants that underlie his claims in the conclusions. His psychological approach has proved sufficient, although somewhat stretched, in categorizing the types of religious individuals and the characteristics of their experiences. Such an "existential" approach,

[121] Ibid., pp. 55, 59, 66. Compare this idea of heretofore unrecognized sensory function to Oliver Sacks's discussions of proprioception, a general sensory network beyond those of the ordinary five senses that delivers information of the body's location in space. See Sacks, "The Disembodied Lady," *The Man Who Mistook his Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (New York: Summit Books, 1985), pp. 43–54.

however, cannot of itself necessarily produce "spiritual" conclusions, or conclusions about the matter of religion on the whole. In 1892 James found that a wider look at his psychological investigations demanded a reconsideration of the assumptions of psychology itself. This was due to the failure of these assumptions to illuminate numerous phenomena that they could, nonetheless, describe (such as sensation). Psychology, then, could identify and verify, but not explain, the facts. So, too, at the conclusion of *Varieties* James finds the facts of religion to demand a more adequate metaphysical description, a more satisfactory account of their concrete characteristics. His over-belief (and this reconstructive reading by extension) is thus hypothetical, but it is an hypothesis developed inductively from a significant consideration of the (albeit selective) data, both on the narrow and on the wider view. The *fact* that apparently subjective, concrete experiences coincide with equally concrete, objective results or effects is ultimately what leads James to reconsider his metaphysical presuppositions.

Much more could be said about the radically empiricist ideas implicit in *Varieties* according to this reading. Now that some stock has been taken here of the methodological restriction to experience, the factual thesis of the reality of relations, the formally monistic metaphysical thesis, and the pragmatic conception of truth identified in chapter 1, several brief comments are in order about the functional account of knowing and the pluralistic thesis of panpsychism. To consider knowing first, it is evident that James is pursuing his twofold "direct acquaintance/ knowledge about" distinction in *Varieties*. The fundamental contrast between feeling (individual, direct experience) and theoretical products (systems of thought) that is a signature of *Varieties* reproduces this distinction. What is unexpected from the perspective of the previous chapters, however, is the priority James ultimately gives to feeling in *Varieties*, an emphasis which has led many to consider his view of religion to be merely subjectivist. He has two lines of defense to this criticism.

The first rejoinder is on empirical, pragmatic grounds. As discussed above, James claims that intellectual religious products on their own have never brought anyone to religion.[122] By this he is making the empirical claim that, although they appear to be stimulated by (religious) experience as by other conceptual products, religious conceptual formulations cannot be directly verified as true because in actual fact they

[122] James, *Varieties*, p. 359.

are not experienced as terminating concretely in their purported objects. Feeling or direct acquaintance must be given priority in religion because, unlike the case of the tigers in India, learning of them conceptually cannot be said necessarily to involve the possibility of leading to an experience of them.[123] The nature of the actual, empirical relations between religious conceptions and their intentional objects, then, forces James to prioritize feeling over thought in religion.[124]

James's second defense against this criticism of dogmatic subjectivism is more metaphysical. Given the theoretical picture that he traces (and I have begun to fill in), it seems quite possible that the "objective world" as we conceptually know it is in fact seriously (and necessarily) delimited and determined by our particular biological and constitutional makeup (both as human beings and as particular human beings). "The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me," he writes, "that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of the many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also."[125] As I argued in chapter 2, the condition of our having a discrete or concrete experience of any sort is also the condition that excludes the possibility of any particular aspect of the discrete experience being considered infallible. As James puts it, "the trail of the serpent [is] over them," indicating that absolute, unconditioned knowledge is categorically excluded precisely because knowledge is inherently relational, and thus also contextual.[126] Since the facts seem ineluctably to suggest (or point to) another dimension and our theoretical understanding as human knowers illuminates just how this could be obscured from us, the likelihood of this hypothesis must be assessed according to empirical data and real effects. The empirically and philosophically suggested conclusion, then, is that conceptual knowledge (or logic) unfortunately cannot lead us in this case; instead we must depend on direct acquaintance.

Finally, let me say a word about radical empiricism's orientation toward pluralistic panpsychism. In the 1895 materials James does not seriously delve into the issue of panpsychism – the thesis that all metaphysical units require a relation to exist, and thus (usually) that they are at minimum self-conscious. In *Varieties*, however, we find him for the first time advancing a view that begins to look like a variation of

[123] For James, the sick-souled who are eventually involuntarily reborn are empirical proof of this.

[124] Because of the empirical nature of this claim, and indeed of the whole project, this generalization by James is subject to falsification.

[125] James, *Varieties*, p. 408. [126] Ibid., p. 352.

panpsychism, because of its postulation of a realm of interconnectedness beyond (or different from) that of the physical or mental, a realm which seems to provide for the sort of relation panpsychists generally postulate. The particular claim that connects James with the panpsychist project is his generalization that religion involves the belief that "union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end."[127] One interesting feature of this claim is that James's panpsychism, like his pragmatic understanding of truth and his moral theory, is "teleological" rather than "archaeological," pointing forward to an end rather than back to a beginning.[128] We should also read James's panpsychism as pluralistic, in the sense that by being prospective in a piecemeal sense, it allows for real loss (of connection), as opposed to the absolute version in which all is brought together at the end.[129] What is unclear about James's panpsychism at the time of *Varieties*, however, is whether James applies this "panpsychist" interpretation only to human subjective phenomena, or rather to all phenomena in the world of experience. It is not apparent as yet, then, whether his pluralistic panpsychism is also metaphysically fundamental (or universal) in addition to being relevant to understanding religion. This issue comprises part of the subject matter of the following chapter, as I turn to James's explicit argument against absolute idealism (transcendental monism) in *A Pluralistic Universe*, and the final form of his philosophical view of both religion and reality.

[127] Ibid., p. 382.
[128] In the sense that ἀρχή means origin or beginning, and τέλος, end or aim.
[129] See James, *Varieties*, p. 413.

CHAPTER 4

Squaring logic and life: making philosophy intimate in "A Pluralistic Universe"

On 22 November 1907 James received a letter from Lawrence Piersall Jacks of Manchester College, Oxford, inviting him to deliver the Hibbert Lectures the following spring. In his communication Jacks noted that *Pragmatism* was being discussed everywhere, and that great value would accrue to the University in having the leader of the movement of pragmatism lecture. He further suggested that, given that Manchester College was theological, the "religious appeal of your philosophy would provide the most appropriate range of topics."[1] James was hesitant to accept the offer, because of the mixed professional reception of his 1906 Lowell Lectures (better known by their 1907 published title, *Pragmatism*) and his frequently expressed hatred of lecturing and the popular style it necessitated.[2] Claiming to his brother Henry that he could nevertheless see his way to another useful book, James agreed to the eight-lecture series within the week. He also noted to Henry, however, that it would be his last such adventure.[3] "The Present Situation in Philosophy" was James's proposal for a topic.

The text of *A Pluralistic Universe* is fascinating for students of James's thought, since in the context of a unified argument about the state of philosophy as a discipline, it engages a majority of the themes that had occupied his mind since the beginning of the 1890s. In fact, in the text one finds psychological, moral, religious, epistemological, methodological, and metaphysical themes woven together in a more coherent and overt way than in any other text from James's hand. Although a detailed commentary on the complete text would be valuable, for the

[1] Lawrence Piersall Jacks to James, 10 November 1907, bMS Am 1092 (439), reprinted in "The Text of *A Pluralistic Universe*," in James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 213–14, n. 2.

[2] See James to F. C. S. Schiller, 4 January 1908, fMS Am 1092, vol. 16, excerpted in Perry, *Thought and Character,* vol. II, p. 583, and in "The Text of *A Pluralistic Universe*," in James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 213. For similar comments, see also James to Théodore Flournoy, 2 January 1908, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 300.

[3] James to Henry James, 30 November 1907, *Correspondence of William James*, vol. III, p. 354.

purposes of my broader argument I shall proceed selectively in the hope of illuminating certain aspects of James's view that are not completely spelled out in earlier writings.

In what follows I focus on: (1) James's criterion for adequate philosophy, and thus his conception of rationality; (2) his argument against the absolute; (3) the problems of the compounding of consciousness and of co-consciousness; (4) his conception of pluralistic panpsychism; and (5) his understanding of God(s) as finite. The criterion for adequate philosophy connects to his earlier philosophical and metaphysical views, which were discussed in chapters 1 and 2. The discussion of the absolute harks back to the 1895–6 seminar on "The Feelings," discussed in chapter 2. The consideration of co-consciousness fills out both the epistemological and the metaphysical discussions of how two minds can know one thing, raised in chapters 1 and 2. And the treatment of pluralistic panpsychism extends and refines James's earlier suggestions of panpsychist leanings, which were considered in brief in chapters 1, 2, and 3. Finally, the evaluation of his understanding of the finite character of any superhuman consciousness will clarify his piecemeal supernaturalism from *Varieties* discussed in chapter 3. The outcome of my analysis will be a clearer view of the ways in which his late view of philosophy is thoroughly engaged with his understanding of religion. Since reading James both contextually and philosophically is a methodological aim of this study, I begin with a brief discussion of the history of his work from 1902–8.

FROM *VARIETIES* TO *A PLURALISTIC UNIVERSE*

The five and one-half years between James's delivery of the final Gifford Lecture and the Hibbert engagement were quite full. Upon his return from England in the fall of 1902, with his health intact, James turned toward the systematic philosophical work promised in *Varieties* and numerous of his letters. During that academic year he pursued the project in "Philosophy 3: The Philosophy of Nature" at Harvard, and in the summer of 1903 he devoted himself to "The Many and the One," his first systematic, philosophical project planned exclusively for publication.[4] The writing did not go well, however, and by the summer

[4] See James, "I. The Many and the One," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, pp. 3–61. The related manuscripts cover a number of typical Jamesian themes, including radical empiricism, pure experience, pragmatism as a method, continuity and conterminousness, panpsychism, and tychism.

of 1904 James had again abandoned the sustained project. Instead, he undertook the production of a torrent of philosophical articles, drawing heavily on the systematic material over which he had been struggling. September 1904 saw the publication of "Does Consciousness Exist?" and "A World of Pure Experience" in consecutive issues of the *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods* (hereafter the *Journal of Philosophy*), inaugurating what became an eight-article "series" in the journal over the next ten months.[5] In October "Humanism and Truth" appeared in *Mind*.[6] In December a version of James's 1898 Berkeley address "The Pragmatic Method" appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy*.[7]

The first half of 1905 brought even more publications. In January "The Thing and its Relations" continued the series in the *Journal of Philosophy*, while "The Experience of Activity" was published in the *Psychological Review*.[8] March saw both "The Essence of Humanism" and "How Two Minds Can Know One Thing" in consecutive issues of the *Journal of Philosophy*.[9] In April "Humanism and Truth Once More" came out in *Mind*, while the *Journal of Philosophy* published "Is Radical Empiricism Solipsistic?"[10] This was followed in May by "The Place of Affectional Facts in a World of Pure Experience," the last of the eight-article "series" in the *Journal of Philosophy*.[11] In June "La Notion de Conscience," an address James had given to the Fifth International Congress of Psychology in Rome in April 1905, appeared in *Archives de Psychologie*, closing out James's publication spree of twelve articles in ten months.[12]

5 *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 1 (1 September 1904), 477–91; 1 (29 September 1904), 533–43. "A World of Pure Experience" was actually split, with the second half published in 1 (13 October 1904), 561–70. James did not set out with a series of articles in mind, but found himself refining and adding to the discussion month to month. See, e.g., his letters to F. J. E. Woodbridge, 6 and 22 February 1905, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, pp. 217, 218.

6 *Mind*, 13 (October 1904), 457–75. This is now better known for its inclusion by James in *The Meaning of Truth* (1909), since it was excluded from Perry's posthumous compilation of James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*.

7 *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 1 (8 December 1904), 673–87.

8 *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 2 (19 January 1905), 29–41; *Psychological Review*, 12 (19 January 1905), 1–17.

9 *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 2 (2 March 1905), 113–18; 2 (30 March 1905), 176–81.

10 *Mind*, 14 (April 1905), 190–8; *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 2 (27 April 1905), 235–8.

11 *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 2 (25 May 1905), 281–7.

12 *Archives de Psychologie*, 5 (June 1905), 1–12. "The Pragmatic Method" was not new; thus we can only say that James wrote *eleven* articles for publication in ten months. He used offprints of the first six of these articles in his 1904–5 "Philosophy 9: Metaphysics," which was repeated the next year. Offprints of all twelve articles were collected by James and deposited in Emerson

In the late spring and summer of 1905, James shifted from the medium of articles to lectures, giving three related series of five lectures each at Wellesley, Chicago, and Glenmore. Although these presentations are frequently understood to be wholly preparatory to his 1906 Lowell Lectures, the extant notes indicate significantly more overt continuity with the metaphysical themes of radical empiricism than is manifested in *Pragmatism*, the text derived from the Lowell Lectures.[13] Lecture I of this series considers the nature of philosophy; lectures 2 and 3 take up the pragmatic method, the one and the many, pluralism, and James's notion of concatenation and the reality of relations; lecture 4 introduces his radical empiricism explicitly as a variety of pluralism, and lecture 5 connects the whole view to meliorism and his understanding of religion.[14] It is particularly noteworthy that, while the lecture notes do contain significant discussion of pragmatism as a method, no mention whatsoever is made of pragmatism as a theory of truth.[15]

The following academic year (1905–6) was filled primarily with writing and teaching. In the case of the former, instead of continuing his thinking through the journals as he had in 1904–5, James began a notebook of unpublished reflections on objections to his radical empiricism raised by Dickinson Sergeant Miller and Boyd Henry Bode

Hall on 20 August 1906 for use in his 1906–7 "Philosophy D: General Problems of Philosophy," the last course James taught. The twelve articles, with some variation, also form the basis of his 1907 plan for a book of fifteen essays titled "Essays in Radical Empiricism." See Bowers's excellent discussion of the plan for the book in "The Text of *Essays in Radical Empiricism*," in James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, pp. 201–6.

13 The extant notes from these 1905 lectures are reprinted as "Appendix III" to James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 279–98. The editors of *Works* indicate that these lectures were "antecedents" to the Lowell Lectures, and thus include them in the volume *Pragmatism*. (See James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 185–6, 277.) Perry is a bit more circumspect about the lectures, implicitly allying them with the 1904–5 essays and distinguishing them from *Pragmatism*. See *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 443. Although the notebook containing the lecture outlines also contained materials on panpsychism, that material is presented separately in the Harvard *Works* edition in James, *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, thus obscuring its antecedent character with respect to *Pragmatism*.

14 The full notes from Wellesley and Chicago exist, while only the first lecture from Glenmore is extant. It is plausible that James used the notes from Chicago for the remainder of the Glenmore lectures.

15 In fact, James appears to follow his distinction from "Humanism and Truth" (1904), wherein he describes pragmatism narrowly as a method of determining meaning, while a broader theory or understanding of truth is called humanism (and connected to Dewey and Schiller). James's articulation of humanism as a theory of truth virtually requires a radically empiricist metaphysics, in contrast to the theory of truth in *Pragmatism*, which *appears* to be "exportable" to various metaphysics. See "Wellesley II," in "Appendix III" to James, *Pragmatism*, p. 281; cf. "Humanism and Truth," *Meaning of Truth*, p. 38.

entitled "The Miller–Bode Objections."[16] Spanning the next three years, these labyrinthine notations focus on the problem of the compounding of consciousness and the related issue of co-consciousness, or the question of how two minds can know one thing. The notebooks thus illustrate in detail the path that leads James to the formulation of these issues in the later lectures of *A Pluralistic Universe*. In his teaching in the fall semester of 1905–6, James offered Philosophy 9, "Metaphysics," for the second consecutive year. That spring he journeyed to Stanford and taught an introduction to philosophy until 18 April, when the Great Earthquake propelled him eastward again.

In the fall of 1906 James offered his last formal course as a professor, Philosophy D, "General Problems in Philosophy," working from a syllabus he had developed the previous spring prior to, if not exclusively for, the Stanford course.[17] The fall also saw him prepare and deliver the eight Lowell Lectures that are the basis of *Pragmatism*, published the following May. James had tendered an offer for this series the previous December, but apparently did not get to work on it until late October 1906.[18] The lectures were delivered between 14 November and 8 December 1906 and then repeated at Columbia University between 29 January and 8 February 1907. Significant manuscripts are not extant, and it is unclear how extensive James's notes were. In any case, during the winter and spring of 1907 he prepared the material for publication both serially and in book form, handing over the final copies to Houghton & Company by 19 March 1907.[19]

The summer and early fall of 1907 found James relaxing in New Hampshire in his new state of retirement, writing several short rejoinders to objections concerning his articles on radical empiricism and his discussions of truth in the Lowell Lectures. Letters indicate that although

[16] This is not to say that James ceased to publish in philosophical journals. He did not, however, see anything philosophical published until 21 June 1906, when "G. Papini and the Pragmatist Movement in Italy" appeared in the *Journal of Philosophy*. The vast majority of James's philosophical articles after that were brief, serving as refinements or clarifications of either earlier articles or his published lectures.

[17] See Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 445; and "Textual Apparatus" in James, *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 652.

[18] See "The Text of *Pragmatism*," James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 185–6.

[19] Three lectures were published serially: lecture 1 was printed as "A Defence of Pragmatism: I. Its Mediating Office," *Popular Science Monthly*, 70 (March 1907), 193–206; lecture 2 as "A Defence of Pragmatism: II. What Pragmatism Means," *Popular Science Monthly*, 70 (April 1907), 351–64; lecture 6 as "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 4 (14 March 1907), 141–55.

his health was deteriorating, he did plan one more book, one which he described to his brother Henry in September as:

> another immortal work, less popular but more original than "pragmatism," which latter no one seems mightily to understand, representing it as a philosophy got up for the use of engineers, electricians and doctors, whereas it really grew up from a more subtle and delicate theoretic analysis of the function of knowing, than previous philosophers had been willing to make.[20]

In October James reiterated this desire to Henry, describing his projected work as "more original and ground-breaking than anything I have yet put forth(!)," noting that he expected to send it out to print by spring.[21] It seems unlikely by these comments that James meant to indicate *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, since by his own outline that was merely to be a collection of previously published articles. Equally implausible is the idea that this comment refers to the book James had outlined in the Wellesley/Chicago/Glenmore notebook of 1905, since a significant portion of that plan either overlaps with *Essays in Radical Empiricism* or was taken up in *Pragmatism*.[22] Whatever he may have intended in the fall of 1907, when the invitation for the Hibbert Lectures arrived just over a month later from Jacks, James was forced once again into a momentous decision over the form and style of his remaining work. As mentioned earlier, with some hesitation he opted again to pursue his interests through the medium of spoken lecture. Before his death in 1910, he wrote several more articles, collected some of his essays for *The Meaning of Truth* in 1909, and even began writing out his notes from Philosophy D as an introductory text to be called *Some Problems in Philosophy*. Composed between December 1907 and May 1908, however, the Hibbert Lectures – *A Pluralistic Universe* – proved to be James's last sustained and completed philosophical effort.

ADEQUATE PHILOSOPHY: INTIMACY, FOREIGNNESS, AND RATIONALITY

Subtitled "The Present Situation in Philosophy," *A Pluralistic Universe* is a direct if not completely thorough criticism of philosophies of the

[20] James to Henry James, 8 September 1907, *Correspondence of William James*, vol. III, p. 344.

[21] See the letter from James to W. Cameron Forbes, 11 June 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 289, and that to his brother Henry, 6 October 1907, James, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 299.

[22] For the plan for the book, see "Appendix III" to James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 295–6.

absolute from the perspective of James's refined and fully fleshed out radical empiricism, which he also designates in these lectures as "a pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe."[23] James, whose only earned post-baccalaureate degree was that of doctor of medicine (MD), crafts his lectures to take what might aptly be called a medical perspective toward the present situation in philosophy.[24] In light of this metaphor, lectures 1–6 can be said to pursue a "case history" of philosophy's progressions and manifestations, starting with the cynical temper of (empiricist) mechanical materialism, and moving forward through the various expressions of the "sympathetic" yet rationalistic forms of spiritualistic philosophy common to James's day. Lectures 2, 3, and part of 5 may be understood to analyze and diagnose the cause of the declining health of the dominant spiritualistic philosophy, namely, the incoherence in its world-view brought on by its intellectualist logic. Lectures 5–8 prescribe an overt cure in the form of a refined radical empiricism, which, although pluralistic, is nonetheless sympathetic (spiritual), organic (panpsychist), and open to religion (pantheist). "Let empiricism once become associated with religion, as hitherto, through some strange misunderstanding, it has become associated with irreligion," James writes, "and I believe that a new era of religion as well as of philosophy will be ready to begin."[25] James's principal goal in these Hibbert Lectures is to usher in that new era of alliance among empiricism, religion, and philosophy.

As he did in the Lowell Lectures and the Wellesley/Chicago/Glenmore series, James begins his presentation in the Hibbert Lectures with a categorization of the types of philosophical thinking, historical and contemporary.[26] Instead of setting out a singular dilemma as he

[23] In this chapter I use "absolute idealism," "absolutism," "transcendental monism," and "philosophy of the absolute" interchangeably to refer to various forms of post-Hegelian idealism. This follows James's usage in the text. It should be noted, however, that Hegel is not among these thinkers, since on James's view he does not subcribe to standard logic as do the post-Hegelians.

[24] This metaphor connects nicely with the sympathetic temperament which James avows in these lectures, as well as with the organic view indicated by his pluralistic panpsychism.

[25] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 142. I have suggested elsewhere that James's metaphysics might be thought of as a "homeopathic remedy" in relation to certain contemporary philosophical problems. A similar point might be made with respect to the analysis of *A Pluralistic Universe*. See Lamberth, "Intimations of the Finite: Thinking Pragmatically at the End of Modernity," *Harvard Theological Review*, 90:2 (1997), 205–23.

[26] The discussion is an interesting application of James's contingent, evolutionary model of thought, since he treats the history of philosophy as a developmental struggle among different ways of thinking. This chapter has, therefore, interesting implications for understanding James's notion of the nature of philosophical truth. For further discussion of his evolutionary stance,

did in *Pragmatism*, in the first of the Hibbert Lectures he presents a much more complex view of the philosophical landscape.[27] In place of *Pragmatism*'s "Tough-minded/Tender-minded" temperamental split, he begins here with a contrast between philosophers of a cynical temper and those of a sympathetic disposition. The cynical temper, on James's view, results in materialistic philosophies, which regard the human "soul" as basically foreign to the universe. By contrast, the sympathetic temper produces a spiritualistic philosophy, one which finds the human being to be in more intimate relation to the world than does that of the materialist. This is so, James argues, because spiritualistic philosophies propose a spiritual principle that is central to the universe and similar to human beings.[28]

James's ultimate goal in *Pragmatism* was to mediate between the two tempers he identified. In the Hibbert Lectures, by contrast, he is exclusively interested in defending radical empiricism against philosophies of the absolute. Consequently, instead of considering in detail all the possible types of philosophical thinking, James dispenses immediately with the cynical temper and its resultant materialism.[29] It is clear from the outset, then, that although radical empiricism does take certain cues from both materialism and philosophies of the absolute, the Hibbert Lectures are not fundamentally concerned with either mediation or "a new name for some old ways of thinking," as was *Pragmatism*. Instead, James crafts his Oxford lectures to vanquish the absolute and ring in a new way of thinking.[30]

see chapter 2 of Levinson, *Science, Metaphysics, and Salvation*; cf. James's comments on the potential fate of his own "radical empiricism" in "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 22; see also James, *Meaning of Truth*, pp. 116ff., for comments on the nature of truth.

27 In *Pragmatism* James groups eight dyadic philosophical monikers under the rubrics of "Tender-minded" and "Tough-minded." Although he admits that each group is not internally consistent, and proposes that his "pragmatism" is a reconciliation between the two, the dual categorization proves to be one of the most memorable things about the lectures. See James, *Pragmatism*, p. 13 and passim.

28 James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 15–16. It is interesting that James here opposes spiritualistic philosophy to materialistic philosophy, whereas in *Pragmatism* he had set "idealistic" opposite "materialistic." "Idealistic" and "spiritualistic" are clearly coordinate when taken broadly, although James prefers not to call himself an idealist. There are few if any historical uses of the term "idealism" prior to James that resonate with the radical aspects of his radical empiricism.

29 Thus we see James returning overtly to the stance indicated in his 1895 President's Address to the American Philosophical Association, where he both jettisoned his own dualism and made a scathing criticism of materialism. (See chapter 2.) As mentioned in chapter 3, James had seemed at first glance in *Varieties* to go back on at least part of this, since he leaned on the position of his own *Psychology* for the bulk of his descriptive project.

30 "A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking" is the subtitle to *Pragmatism*. James concludes *A Pluralistic Universe* with a quotation from Tennyson: "Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes, but ring the fuller minstrel in." See p. 149.

Focusing henceforth exclusively on spiritualistic philosophies, James again invokes the criteria of foreignness and intimacy to make a further distinction, this time between dualistic theism and pantheism as subdivisions of spiritualistic philosophy. Traditional dualistic theism casts the human as relatively foreign and external to both God and truth, he observes, while pantheism stresses the intimacy and internal connection between both the human and the divine, and the human and the world.[31] According to this desideratum of intimacy, then, pantheism is the chief arena for philosophical contest. Within pantheism James finds the real philosophical division at issue in his lectures: the choice between the more monistic variety of pantheism, which he calls the philosophy of the absolute, and the more pluralistic form, which he designates here as radical empiricism.[32] James's classification of the types of philosophical thinking and the attendant differentiating characteristics, then, is as follows:

Temper	**Genus of philosophy**	**Species (in terms of theism)**	**Subspecies of *Weltanschauung***
cynical ➜	materialistic foreign		
sympathetic ➜	spiritualistic ➜ intimate	dualistic foreign, dualistic	
	↘	pantheistic intimate, ➜ monistic	philosophy of the absolute foreign, more monistic
		↘	radical empiricism intimate, more pluralistic

James's typology of philosophical thinking is fascinating, if for no other reason than its provocative idiosyncrasy. The classification, however, is not merely eccentric: additionally, it provides significant insight into his mature understanding of the philosophical enterprise. The first lecture began with the familiar Jamesian theme of philosophers painting pictures of the world, taking their cues by analogy from particular

[31] It is not clear whom James has in mind as the principal representative(s) of dualistic theism. He relates it to "scholastic philosophy," and states that it is "professed as firmly as ever at all catholic seats of learning," suggesting Thomism, but later comments could also be interpreted as referring to Protestant scholasticism. (Thomas was "rehabilitated," elevated as a doctor of the church, by Leo XIII in 1879.) See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 16–17.

[32] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 16–20.

fragments found within the very world they represent.[33] What is novel about the first lecture as a whole is not so much its general model of what the practice of philosophy is, but rather the particular model of what James finds to be good or persuasive philosophy in fact.[34] The most obvious characteristic of "good" philosophy in lecture 1 is manifest to James, as above, in the predominant contrast he sees between the foreign and the intimate.

In previous discussions of the broad philosophical options available, James had frequently made use of the rationalism/empiricism dichotomy as a means of distinguishing desirable from undesirable philosophical methods, if not also world-views.[35] He generally sides with empiricism on methodological grounds, even though he was consistently dissatisfied with the world-view of its premier representative, materialism.[36] The Lowell Lectures of 1906 reinforced this presumed alliance to a degree, in that there James placed empiricism and materialism together under the "Tough-minded" temper.[37] By contrast, in *A Pluralistic Universe* he gives materialism no consideration whatsoever, dismissing it out of hand on the basis of his intimacy criterion. This rebuff of the materialist world-view does not, however, imply in any way a rejection of empiricism. Aligning himself explicitly and exclusively with spiritualistic philosophies, James states nonetheless that "both empiricism and absolutism bring the philosopher inside and make man intimate."[38] Therefore, in 1908 the meaningful or momentous division between rationalism and empiricism for James is wholly subsequent, rather than equivalent, to the materialistic/spiritualistic distinction.[39]

[33] Ibid., pp. 9–10. Note the empiricist bent of this claim, as well as its manifestation of analogical induction like that which James praises in Fechner.

[34] "[T]he truth is *one species of good*, and not, as is usually supposed, a category distinct from good, and co-ordinate with it," James, *Pragmatism*, p. 42. The materialist's rejoinder here that philosophy is simply interested in the truth, and cannot be waylaid by merely human demands such as goodness, would not strike James as being terribly coherent.

[35] "Rationalistic" and "Empiricist" head their respective lists in *Pragmatism*'s listing of the characteristics of the two tempers. *Pragmatism* is, however, somewhat more ambiguous about rationalism than James had often been (in print) because of its theme of "mediation." See James, *Pragmatism*, p. 13.

[36] See chapter 2 for a discussion of James's concerns about materialism.

[37] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 13. In seeking a mediating strategy in the Lowell Lectures, James sought to take aspects from both tempers. His view selects Idealistic, Optimistic, Religious, and Freewillist from the Tender-minded temper, while preferring Empiricist, Sensationalistic, and Pluralistic from the Tough-minded. It is plausible that he also preferred the Sceptical to the Dogmatical, although neither position fits his philosophy well.

[38] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 21.

[39] Incidentally, the materialistic/spiritualistic cut in *A Pluralistic Universe* is seen to derive by analogy from the contrast between mechanical and organic systems. See p. 18. James later

By extension, the rationalism/empiricism contrast is also subsequent, and ultimately subservient, to the intimacy/foreignness distinction that James invokes in his dismissal of materialism. It follows, then, that in *A Pluralistic Universe* intimacy is James's most general criterion for distinguishing good philosophy.

The intimacy/foreignness dichotomy from James's classificatory lecture recurs throughout *A Pluralistic Universe*, even though it is a relatively new turn of phrase for James in 1908, at least in print. The distinction first appears in James's published corpus in the 1904 discussion of conjunctive relations in "A World of Pure Experience." "Relations," James writes, "are of different degrees of intimacy." They range from the most external, mere "withness," to the most intimate, which are exemplified in the relations experienced between terms that "form states of mind, and are immediately conscious of continuing each other."[40] Intimacy, internality, and relative continuity go hand in hand, while foreignness, externality, and relative discontinuity appear to be at the other extreme of the relational continuum.[41]

In his 1905–6 seminar on metaphysics, James had claimed that one of the congenial consequences of his radically empiricist philosophy was that it "frankly interprets the universe after a *social* analogy."[42] In lecture 1 of *A Pluralistic Universe* James returns to this consequence, linking his relational criterion of intimacy with sociality. Criticizing the "monarchical" God of dualistic theism, James writes that, "There is a sense, then, in which philosophic theism makes us outsiders and keeps us foreigners in relation to God, in which, at any rate, his connexion with us appears as unilateral and not reciprocal."[43] Foreignness such as that implicit in dualistic theism involves externality, and it also (at least at its extremes) presents a "mono-active" rather than an interactive relation. "Our relation [in dualistic theism]," James writes, "is not a strictly social relation."[44] By contrast, intimate relations are social (and

implies that transcendental monism also proceeds mechanically, in contrast to organically. See pp. 89–91.

[40] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 23. See chapter 1 for additional discussion of this passage. There is a discussion of the sense of personal identity in *Principles of Psychology* that anticipates this to a degree: James speaks of the character of "warmth" in the present self, and of "warmth and intimacy" toward a narrative, as opposed to a feeling of foreignness. Related to this is a discussion of continuity and discontinuity which is, however, limited to psychological entities. See James, *Principles of Psychology*, pp. 316–18.

[41] Intimacy is also mentioned with regard to relations in the notes to lecture 4 of the 1905 Chicago lectures. See "Appendix III," James, *Pragmatism*, p. 290.

[42] James, "Notes for Philosophy 9: Metaphysics (1905–6)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 367.

[43] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 17. [44] Ibid., p. 17.

social relations intimate) in precisely the sense that they are reciprocal and interactive.[45] By extension, their terms are interdependent in a meaningful sense.

Shortly after this mention, James relates intimacy and sociality again, this time in a brief and digressive comparison of the pragmatic difference in meaning of materialistic and spiritualistic understandings of the universe:

> From a pragmatic point of view the difference between living against a background of foreignness and one of intimacy means the difference between a general habit of wariness and one of trust. One might call it a social difference, for after all, the common *socius* of us all is the great universe whose children we are. If materialistic, we must be suspicious of this socius, cautious, tense, on guard. If spiritualistic, we may give way, embrace, and keep no ultimate fear.[46]

Socius means an ally, a partner, even a family member with whom one is actively and closely related. For James interpreting the universe after a social analogy – evaluating philosophical views according to their intimacy – means seeking out a view of the universe in which human beings are reciprocal partners working in an atmosphere of trust, involved in the outcome not only as beneficiaries but also as full partners.[47] This resultant habit of trust, which is the psychological product of a spiritualistic *Weltanschauung*, guarantees pragmatically that a spiritualistic philosophy means something more than does mere materialism.[48] Even if *all* the rest of the facts are the same (which James doubts seriously), at a minimum a world interpreted after a social analogy is a world wherein trust is both possible and (at least potentially) real. The objective consequences that follow from this "subjective" fact are, without doubt, themselves factually significant.

[45] Also criticizing "the older, monarchical theism" from the perspective of "interactivity," James writes that "the vaster vistas which scientific evolutionism has opened, and the rising tide of social democratic ideals, have changed the type of our imagination . . . The place of the divine in the world must be more organic and intimate." See ibid., p. 18.

[46] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 19.

[47] James's use of trust in relation to sociality here bears an interesting resemblance to Royce's discussion of loyalty, which, although published in 1908, was derived from a 1906 series of lectures. See Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), e.g., pp. 19–20. Incidentally, James had employed *Socius* in *Principles of Psychology*, where in the chapter on "The Consciousness of Self" he wrote that, "The impulse to pray is a necessary consequence of the fact that whilst the innermost of the empirical selves of a man is a Self of the *social* sort, it yet can find its only adequate *Socius* in an ideal world." See p. 301.

[48] Compare this to James's minimal claim about the objective (from psychology's perspective) meaning of religion in the conclusions of *Varieties*. See chapter 3.

In discussing James's criterion of intimacy thus far, I have suggested various possibilities that are opened out by siding with intimacy over foreignness. In short, an intimate philosophical view leads us to expect a world of greater connection and interdependence, wherein humanistic social goals can potentially become more fully realized if they are assiduously pursued, and where, ultimately, we can place our trust if we are willing. James implies in the concluding lecture at Oxford, however, that the intimacy criterion is not just a philosophical ideal to be lobbied for on the grounds of mere taste or desire; rather, it is a more integral and compelling aspect of both thought and reality, understood philosophically. On this view, the prospect of intimacy itself demands to be accounted for by any valid philosophy that claims to be adequate to the world we live in. This more deeply metaphysical view of intimacy is exhibited in his startling suggestion that we replace the rational/irrational distinction at the ground level in philosophy with that between intimacy and foreignness:

> It would be better to give up the word "rational" altogether than to get into a merely verbal fight about who has the best right to keep it.
>
> Perhaps the words "foreignness" and "intimacy," which I put forward in my first lecture, express the contrast I insist on better than the words "rationality" and "irrationality."[49]

This unexpected proposal occurs after James has repeatedly questioned the adequacy to the world of experience of both intellectualist and Hegelian understandings of rationality. Following yet another refrain of that discussion, he observes acutely that the word "rational" has degenerated into a merely eulogistic term, since no one sincerely advertises their views as "irrational." James's suggestion that "rationality" and "irrationality" should be replaced by "intimacy" and "foreignness" respectively is, however, far more than a linguistic point. In the context of his broader philosophical view, one can see this suggestion as tying the criterion of good philosophy rather tightly with the radically empiricist view of reality, knowledge, and action.[50] His point about intimacy and foreignness, then, might be said to be an "aesthetic" point in the deep (Kantian) sense of the term, rather than a preferential statement of how he would like the world to be.[51]

[49] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 144–5.

[50] Making philosophies themselves parts of the world described is one of James's desiderata in his lectures. See ibid., pp. 21, 143.

[51] There are quite significant and wide-ranging differences between the respective views of James and Kant. Kant's aesthetic is formal, and limited to the appearances of things in themselves

As I mentioned above, James's conception of the intimacy/foreignness continuum maps directly onto the continuum of relationality, at least that of continuity and discontinuity which he focuses on in radical empiricism.[52] Given the factual thesis of radical empiricism, on which relations are considered to be matters of fact as much as any other elements of experience, James has a metaphysical "hook" for the criterion of intimacy that he uses in assessing good philosophy. To put this another way, intimacy for James is a phenomenological analogue to particular factual relations in the metaphysical picture cast by radical empiricism.

Although the factual thesis of radical empiricism links intimacy into the metaphysical view, in itself it does not justify James's preference for intimacy. Radical empiricism claims that all relations can be factual, relations of both continuity and discontinuity. On this claim it is indeterminate whether the world is more continuous or discontinuous, and thus also indeterminate whether a particular philosophy should be more intimate or foreign to be more adequate to experience. James's radical empiricism, however, does not stop with the factual, metaphysical thesis, but, as I argued in chapter 1, pushes forward into a tightly integrated account of knowing. On the twofold Jamesian account of knowing, the "special experience" of the relation of continuity – leading – is absolutely crucial to the verification of knowledge about in the field of pure experience. For example, in the case of objective reference, verified knowledge about is characterized by an experience of leading continuously through a context of associates, eventually terminating in a direct acquaintance of the pure experience meant.[53] As the analogue to the relation of continuity, therefore, intimacy is a marker (or product) of true conceptions, insofar as it is a product of their relatively successful verification.[54] Philosophy, aspiring after the truth of its conceptions,

(whether there is anything else to be spoken of is a rather open question). James's aesthetic, by contrast, might be characterized as participatory and direct, in the sense that relations are dynamically enacted, rather than simply given (although they are part and parcel of the experience). Likewise, because of the phenomenalistic bent of James's view, there is no question of some intuitive rendering of the world other than that evidenced through his "aesthetic."

52 It is an interesting question whether all relations possible can be considered to be somewhere on this continuum: James does not engage in much speculation or classification of this beyond the discussion in "Does Consciousness Exist?"

53 There are, however, classes of knowledge about that do not terminate directly in a direct acquaintance, allowing only for indirect verification. See chapter 1 for more detail.

54 True in so far forth, true as far as they go, James would say. The relative cannot be stressed enough here, since relations of continuity and discontinuity are matters of degree. James's understanding of intimacy here is, interestingly, a metaphysical extension of his psychological

must therefore at least prefer intimacy as an immediate product, phenomenal intimacy in the first intention as the mark of truth. Whether philosophy should also prefer intimacy as an ideal, intimacy in the second intention, is unclear as yet from the radically empiricist perspective. Such an attribution (for a radical empiricist) ultimately pertains to and depends on the particular nature of reality itself. As such, it cannot be determined in advance by logical argument alone, but rather must be determined within experience collectively, through both induction and actual testing in concrete experiences.[55]

In a move reminiscent of the spirit of Hegel's objective idealism, typified in the oft-quoted phrase "What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational," James himself is game to try out a philosophy that heeds intimacy (in place of rationality) at both the metaphysical and the epistemological level.[56] That is, James seeks to maximize intimacy in his philosophy not only in the first intention, as a product of verifying his conceptions, but also as a characteristic in the second intention of the conceptions of reality themselves (and by extension, of reality itself). To be precise, this preference for intimacy does not apply to all conceptions whatsoever: everyday objects remain as intimate or as foreign, as continuous or discontinuous, as concrete experience indicates. Unlike these everyday objects, with which one can be directly acquainted in the field of experience, there are on James's philosophical *Weltanschauung* several classes of conceptions that are unable to be directly verified. In chapter 1 I referred to one of these classes of *denkmittel* as "aggregates." These conceptions – such as the mind, God, a nation, the universe, experience (taken collectively) – are not meaningless or empty, for they have (at minimum) functional meanings (and explanatory roles) within experience in the short term, as well as pragmatic implications in the longer term. They are, however, not concretely experienced in any mode approaching their totality, at least not by

discussion of the sentiment of rationality in 1879. There he had characterized the sentiment of rationality as "fluent," "unimpeded mental function." See James, *Will to Believe*, pp. 57–89, specifically p. 58.

55 This is continuous with James's "Bergsonian" criticism of the ability of logic to determine what will be (discussed in more detail below). A highly (though not exclusively) continuous universe and a highly discontinuous universe are both logically possible. It may just be the case that the world is not as continuous as James might wish, and thus intimacy in the second intention (choosing intimate conceptions) will not be productive of intimacy in the first intention (the special experience of intimacy denoting leading), namely, trueness.

56 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, T. M. Knox (tr.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 10. For comment, see Hegel, *Logic*, §6. The *Logic* is the text of Hegel's to which James has the most recourse in *A Pluralistic Universe*.

human beings.[57] James's preference for intimacy in philosophical conceptions (or intimacy in the second intention – at the conceptual level itself) appears to be directly oriented toward these "philosophical aggregates," these conceptions (and entities) that bring and hold together concrete experiences varying differentially across time and space. As I shall detail it in several of the following sections, James's advocacy of pluralistic panpsychism in *A Pluralistic Universe* proves ultimately to be a metaphysical expression of this commitment to intimacy with regard to such philosophical aggregates.

One final note about James's preference for intimacy is in order concerning its philosophical status. For a spiritualistic thinker such as Hegel (particularly as James reads him), the commitment to the actuality of the rational is metaphysical in the deepest (and most rationalistic) sense: the rational is taken to be prior to (and in fact productive of) the world, and as such, nothing in fact could falsify it. For James, intimacy is also metaphysical, but it is not logically prior to reality in any meaningful sense; instead, it is factually involved in both reality and our philosophical accounts thereof. Where Hegel is a rationalist methodologically, beginning with concepts and their logic, and granting them exclusive priority over everything else, James is above all methodologically an empiricist, holding out for the novel in experience beyond that which can be conceptually ordained, and making his philosophy conform to actual experience. Where Hegel's commitment to a fundamentally rational world is dogmatically unrevisable, James's advocacy of intimacy is ultimately hypothetical and contingent; it is unable to be either vouchsafed or coerced by logical argument in advance, and thus is subject to falsification or verification within concrete experience and action in the world. James certainly attempts to make the most persuasive argument for the viability of his *Weltanschauung*, but he is forever aware that he can in principle make no ironclad case. Accordingly, at the conclusion of the Hibbert Lectures James reproduces his "faith-ladder" from *The Will to Believe* as an explanation of how one might begin to understand the world to be both distributive and intimate. "Not one step in this project is logical [coerced by logic]," he writes, "yet it is the way in which monists and pluralists alike espouse and

[57] The mind might be an exception here, insofar as the pulse of experience, or a given field of experience, can be considered to be the mind as a totality. This does not, however, adequately account for the continuity of an individual's experience over time, which James is continually concerned with, and thus the mind as an historical whole appears never to be concretely experienced as a whole.

hold fast to their visions. It is life exceeding logic."[58] For James, experience certainly cannot be said directly to contravene conceptual logic; by the same token, however, experience for him is also not limited to what logic can, of itself, predict. Insofar as philosophy seeks to illuminate life, adequate philosophy for James must exceed mere conceptual logic in its constructions, looking to the intimacy of experience for its details and its validation. That is the sort of balancing act he seeks in *A Pluralistic Universe*.[59]

THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE ABSOLUTE

One crucial step on the faith-ladder to a pluralistic, radically empiricist view of the universe is rendering the contenders of radical empiricism less plausible. The chief philosophical rival throughout James's career was absolute idealism, or transcendental monism. I argued in chapter 2 that in his 1895–6 course on "The Feelings," James had sought to provide a philosophical alternative to the understanding of cognition in transcendental monism. At the conclusion of that course, however, James noted that, although he himself preferred the pluralistic model of ejective fields, his field-theory alternative remained amenable to the supposition of one, all-embracing field: the absolute or the all-knower. The most he could claim to have done in 1895, then, was to have rendered the general picture of transcendental monism hypothetical, because of his presentation of a viable, ultimately pluralistic, alternative.

James came back to the absolute and the all-knower in many of his publications between 1895 and 1908, mustering religious, moral, epistemological, and metaphysical objections to the view. The most thorough argument against the absolute occurs, however, in his Hibbert Lectures, which among other things are a sustained refutation of what James takes to be the arguments of his monistic contemporaries.[60] Given his analysis of the (then) present situation in philosophy in lecture 1, the most pressing issue for rendering a more intimate (and thus more adequate – we might even substitute "rational") philosophy is deciding

[58] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148. Note that step two of the faith-ladder involves satisfying the principle of non-contradiction.

[59] For a more detailed discussion of the conception of intimacy in *A Pluralistic Universe*, see Lamberth, "Interpreting the Universe After a Social Analogy."

[60] It is doubtful that any of those thinkers implicated would have found themselves adequately represented by James. I do not claim here to address the (clearly relevant) issue of whether James has set up straw arguments to knock down; instead, I am more interested in *his* argument and the position it reveals. T. L. S. Sprigge's *James and Bradley* makes a nice contribution to this question.

between the more monistic and the more pluralistic varieties of pantheism, choosing between the "all-form" of philosophy of the absolute and the "each-form" of radical empiricism.[61] On the basis of James's radically empiricist understanding of the hypothetical character of philosophical argumentation, on which logical validity is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition of proof for a particular position, it is crucial to the promotion of his own view that he also make some headway against the arguments for the absolute.

To achieve this goal, James pursues two distinct (although interrelated) strategies. First, as he had in 1895, he argues that the absolute itself is not logically coercive (or necessary), but rather is merely an hypothesis. In an ancillary move, he also seeks to show the absolute to be implausible as an hypothesis and inadequate to the facts of experience. Second, he launches a frontal assault, arguing that his contenders' understanding of the unity of the absolute and the world is internally incoherent. The first strategy, like that of 1895, attempts to open the door to James's own pluralism; the second approach, seen in detail here for the first time, is designed to slam that same door shut on the philosophy of the absolute.

James's hypothetical interpretation of absolute idealism is clear from the very beginning of the Hibbert Lectures, where he offers his categorization of philosophical thinking. In that schema the philosophy of the absolute is described as one of two versions of pantheism, alongside a pluralistic contender that James calls radical empiricism. Both philosophies, he says, set out to "identify human substance with the divine substance," and both seek to interpret the place of the divine in the world as "more organic and intimate."[62] Where they differ is on the issue of whether or not there must logically be an *all*-form for the divine to be rendered intimate, or whether a distributive, *each*-form is logically as acceptable for achieving their shared goal. In treating radical empiricism and the philosophy of the absolute as competing hypotheses of the same order, James actually begins to shift the burden of proof from his pluralistic view over to absolute idealism. Where in the 1895 course on "The Feelings," the burden had been on him to offer a viable alternative to monism, and thus through his conclusions to render transcendental monism hypothetical, here James begins by treating it hypothetically, and then moves in relatively short order also to deny its viability or adequacy.

[61] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 20–2. [62] Ibid., pp. 20, 18.

Although James in one sense simply declares the hypothetical status of the absolute here, he also provides several arguments that both buttress his view and begin the critique of the absolute's viability. Chief among these is his argument that the absolute is not forced on our belief by logic. "The great *claim* of the philosophy of the absolute," he writes, "is that the absolute is no hypothesis, but a pre-supposition implicated in all thinking, and needing only a little effort of analysis to be seen as a logical necessity."[63] This view, James notes, is manifested in various refutations of pluralism's (or empiricism's) dual espousal of both the independence and connection of particular experiences. If there is the slightest degree of independence, the absolutist maintains, there is no way of keeping it from degenerating into chaos. By the same token, if there is the slightest degree of connection, there is no way of keeping it from expanding into a total oneness.[64] Admit only a small degree of either connection or disconnection, then, and one is immediately treated to a *reductio ad absurdum* or an acceptance of the absolute. The problem with such an argument, James observes, is that it is purely verbal, since it takes the terms "independence" and "connection" exhaustively to define the properties of the objects that they modify and to which they refer. This habit of treating "a name as excluding from the fact named what the name's definition fails positively to include," which James sees as common to all philosophies of the absolute, he dubs "*vicious intellectualism.*"[65] He further observes that this method of thinking is typical of rationalism, connected as it is to the rationalist's predisposition to find concepts more real or true than percepts. This intellectualist method also turns out to be crucial in constructing the supposed logical necessity of the absolute.

For an example of transcendental monism's basic view of the necessity of the absolute, James turns to the work of Josiah Royce. James's rendition of the argument (which is not altogether fair to Royce) begins with two assumptions: (1) the common idea that individual objects are independent; and (2) the view, shared by both rationalism and previous empiricisms, that relations between objects are third things, additional to and therefore independent of the original objects. Given intellectualism's interpretation of concepts – that they exclude what is not explicitly included, in order for any two things *a* or *b* (James uses Royce's cat and King example) to stand in relation, there must be a third thing – a relation, which, as also independent, then requires two more relations

[63] Ibid., p. 29. [64] See ibid., pp. 30–1. [65] Ibid., p. 32.

to interconnect it to the two original things, which require additional relations, and so on *ad infinitum*. As such an infinite regress is obviously untenable, Royce (on James's reading) proposes that we revoke the assumption (1) of the independence of the object, since a thoroughly disconnected world is clearly unhelpful philosophically. But upon assuming that objects are not independent, the admission of connection carries to the maximal degree, resulting in the conclusion that *a* and *b* are a single fact in two names, or perhaps more accurately, that the smallest fact is co-implicated in the absolute.[66] Such is the logical high road to the absolute.

James is well aware that Royce's actual proof is more complex, involving as it does a conception of cognition on which reference is accounted for by the transcendence of ideas in the mind over objects in the "world." However complex and intellectually intriguing it may be, James thinks that the outcome of such an intellectualist view is ultimately unsatisfying and, more importantly, unpersuasive: "The reasoning is pleasing from its ingenuity, and it is almost a pity that so straight a bridge from abstract logic to concrete fact should not bear our weight."[67] James sees no justification, either in conceptual logic or in fact, for the various "viciously intellectual" assumptions that drive the whole argument. "Because the *names* of finite things and their relations are disjoined," he writes, "it doesn't follow that the realities named need a *deus ex machina* from on high to conjoin them."[68] From a common-sense view (much less that of radical empiricism's factual thesis of the reality of relations, or its understanding of the additive character of conceptual thought), it is rather obvious that the same thing could appear in one (conceptual) respect conjoined, and in another disjoined, without necessarily contravening logic. The most meager facts of experience simply do not bear out the exclusionary bias of intellectualism expressed in its "vicious" treatment of both concepts and relations.

The chief point that James makes here is that absolute idealism's argument is not as self-evident as it might seem. Rather than flowing from standard logic, it involves a number of additional assumptions, some of which are highly debatable. For example, instead of rejecting the (relative) independence of things to avoid the *reductio ad absurdum*, one could just as well reject the (unstated) rationalist assumption of the

[66] See ibid., pp. 33–4, for the full detail of James's presentation of this argument.
[67] Ibid., p. 35. [68] Ibid., p. 35.

fundamental priority of concepts over percepts in experience. After all, when conjoined with the idealist thesis that there is only one realm of being (that things are as they appear), it is precisely this rationalistic assumption of the priority of concepts that transforms mere conceptual logic (the standard logic of inference) into the robustly productive (and James thinks erroneous) intellectualist logic by granting it predictive metaphysical hegemony.[69] As James puts it shortly thereafter, "May not the flux of sensible experience itself contain a rationality that has been overlooked?"[70] From his perspective rationalism in general and philosophies of the absolute in particular do not seem to be as logically coercive as they might at first appear.

James also invokes a second line of argument as general support for his hypothetical rendering of the philosophy of the absolute. Pertaining more to the viability of the absolute as an hypothesis rather than its hypothetical nature, this avenue consists in scrutinizing absolute idealism's claim to make the world more rational.[71] James admits that, were absolute idealism's claim to make the world more rational justified in fact, it would render the hypothesis more (probably) true. Much as with his questioning of the inevitability of the absolute, however, James's strategy is to question the adequacy of the very rationality invoked by absolute idealism. Setting the stage, he distinguishes rationality (pluralistically) into four potentially competing kinds, arguing that a balance among them must be sought:

[69] James's usage in his various references to logic is, unfortunately, not altogether consistent. By "logic of identity" or "conceptual logic," he (usually) means simply standard logic, such as the inferential logic Aristotle presents, on which "the same is nothing but the same, and all sames with a third thing are the same with each other" (*Pluralistic Universe*, p. 115). He does not mean what contemporary logicians do by "the logic of identity." James's treatment is at times difficult to follow, however, because he frequently intends a more complex referent than "standard logic" by the terms "logic" or "intellectualist logic" (and even occasionally by the term "logic of identity" – see, e.g., p. 95). This more complex referent includes certain premises of idealism, most notably the idealist principle that things are (really) as they appear, and the rationalist's preference for concepts over percepts (or sensation). Although standard logic by itself is ambiguous as to the relation of concepts to reality, "intellectualist logic," with its rationalistic notion that the conceptual realm is fully indicative of (what deserves to be called) reality, is not. Given this preference for the conceptual order as indicative of appearances (the rationalist thesis), and the notion that things are as they appear (the idealist thesis), "vicious intellectualism" thus follows from standard logic. (Hegel, however, is seen by James to be viciously intellectual without fully subcribing to standard logic.) Since James himself seeks to retain a version of the idealist thesis, he then focuses in his own attack on the rationalist thesis of the priority of the conceptual order, from which standard logic gains the right to dictate reality.

Aside from direct quotations, I use "conceptual logic" or just "logic" for standard logic, and "intellectualist logic" for the combination of standard logic, the idealist thesis, and the rationalistic thesis that James considers (broadly) to distinguish his absolute idealist opponents.

[70] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 38. [71] See ibid., p. 54.

But rationality has at least four dimensions, intellectual, aesthetical, moral and practical; and to find a world rational to the maximal degree *in all these respects simultaneously* is no easy matter . . . the problem accordingly seems at first sight to resolve itself into that of getting a conception which will yield the largest *balance* of rationality.[72]

Cornering the market on one of these sorts of rationality is rather easy: theism, for example, is perfect with regard to the moral dimension, while materialism is ideal intellectually, on account of its tendency toward calculability.[73] James's insight, however, is that perfection in all four simultaneously is impossible because of the overlap of the differing and competing interests behind each dimension; therefore, a maximizing balance is the most desirable of possible solutions.[74] If this is so, however, then so much the worse for absolute idealism, since it does not provide a maximal balance on any calculus. This is due chiefly, James thinks, to the fact that although its assurance of peace is aesthetically satisfying (and perhaps aesthetically perfect), absolute idealism is bankrupt with regard to practical rationality.[75]

James's interpretation of the practical failure of the absolute is quite interesting. Turning as an empiricist to actual human experience, he highlights the ubiquitous reality of change (political and social) and the related centrality of history for human beings. Because the hypothesis of the absolute renders the world fundamentally static, and thus without a meaningful history (since all is caught up in the end by prior fiat), however, James notes that empirically it fails to evoke our sympathy, appearing instead foreign. Aesthetically pleasing though the absolute may be, its assurance of peace therefore belies its classification as a sympathetic philosophy precisely because of its failure to connect or resonate with our own actual experience.[76]

Another critical issue for the absolute's claim to superior rationality is its introduction of the problems of evil and error, or more accurately, its introduction of a problem in justifying the existence of evil and error. On these scores, James finds the absolute wanting not only

[72] Ibid., p. 55. [73] Ibid., p. 55.

[74] This raises the rather interesting question of the extent to which James adopted and maintained certain features of utilitarianism. See Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, p. 586, n. 29, and Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. 1, p. 522.

[75] James notes that the assurance of peace is also intellectually and morally satisfying, but he eventually criticizes the absolute on both of these grounds, on the basis of the introduction of the problem of evil.

[76] Interestingly, this argument is a good example of James's pragmatism, his humanism, and his methodological thesis of radical empiricism in practice.

in terms of producing the maximal balance of rationality, but also in maintaining the minimal level: "On the debit side of the account the absolute, taken seriously . . . introduces all those tremendous irrationalities into the universe which a frankly pluralistic theism escapes."[77] Put quite simply, the question is why the absolute should require the existence of evil, given that it encompasses all that is. To James, rejoinders such as "To the greater glory of God" fall completely flat. Since the absolute itself has no environment, it cannot be understood sympathetically to triumph over evil in a way analogous, say, to good overcoming evil in human experience. Some such experience is apparently the only moral James himself can salvage out of the existence of evil. "But the absolute is represented as a being without environment, upon which nothing alien can be forced, and which has spontaneously chosen from within to give itself the spectacle of all that evil rather than a spectacle with less evil in it," he writes.[78] Given James's understanding of the integral relation of human goods with human rationality and truth, such a conception of the absolute which chooses evil over good spontaneously is far from maximizing rationality; on the contrary, it makes the world ever so much more foreign.

A similar question arises concerning the existence of finite (human) minds: namely, why it is necessary for finite conceptions of the world to exist alongside the absolute, or as James puts it, "Why, the absolute's own total vision of things being so rational, was it necessary to comminute it into all these coexisting inferior fragmentary visions?"[79] The issue really goes to the plausibility as well as to the rationality of the absolute. These "fragmentary visions," limited as they are by their own particular perspectives, cannot for the rationalist be understood to be as perfect as that of the absolute. Thus the extreme form of such differences of perspective ultimately means that the finite perspective of the individual becomes erroneous, insofar as the perspective of the absolute is taken to be the source and origin of truth. "Why," James asks, "should the absolute ever have lapsed from the perfection of its own integral experience of things, and refracted itself into all of our finite experiences?"[80] Providing a reasonable answer to this question is crucial to rendering the absolute a rational hypothesis. By contrast pluralism (particularly when conjoined with pragmatism and radical empiricism), in not linking truth necessarily with the perspective of the absolute, does not broach such a crisis of rationality when faced with

[77] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 57. [78] Ibid., p. 57. [79] Ibid., p. 58. [80] Ibid., p. 58.

the existence of error. Since truth is neither necessarily preexisting nor generative on pluralism's view, then the existence of variable perspectives, and even error, does not prove metaphysically to be problematic. Overall, then, although assuming the absolute may have the advantage of "rationalizing" all elements of the universe *in principle*, it is far from obvious, James argues, that the presupposition of the absolute increases the overall balance of rationality *in fact*. On James's own estimation, it actually decreases both the balance and the overall degree of rationality.

In characterizing James's criticism of the absolute above, I sketched out two broad avenues of criticism, one which describes the absolute as an hypothesis and seeks to impeach its credibility, and one which claims that the absolute is logically incoherent from its own perspective. This latter, head-on criticism is related to several of James's arguments about the hypothetical nature of philosophies of the absolute, most notably, his critique of vicious intellectualism and his analysis of the problem of error. His incoherence criticism differs significantly, however, in that it shifts the burden of proof (and even meaning) *in toto* from James to his rivals by representing absolute idealism as fundamentally incoherent – as not bearing critical scrutiny. As such (and if successful), this argument alone *should* be enough to finish the absolute once and for all, paving the way for pluralisms like radical empiricism or other philosophical contenders. James is, as usual, quite genial and polite in his final conclusions to his Hibbert Lectures, stating that, "This world *may*, in the last resort, be a block-universe; but on the other hand it *may* be a universe only strung-along, not rounded in and closed."[81] Philosophically speaking, however, by that point in the lectures James feels he has reduced that "may" for the absolute to the most improbable of possibilities.[82] In any case the onus is by then on the philosophers of the absolute to articulate a coherent response to James's objections.

In discussing the absolute's introduction of the problem of error, James draws attention to the experiential difference between the finite perspective and that of the infinite. The central tenet of absolute idealism, however, is that the two perspectives are "identical" in some

[81] Ibid., p. 148.

[82] James's intention was to decimate the absolute, as one can see from a letter to his brother Henry, in which he wrote that he was "eager for the scalp of the Absolute." See James to Henry James, 29 April 1908, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 303.

meaningful sense.[83] James's incoherence objection is that, given their rationalistic, idealistic, and logical commitments, there is no way for philosophies of the absolute to make meaningful sense of this kind of identity in difference. As he sums it up, "I don't logically see how a collective experience of any grade whatever can be treated as logically identical with a lot of distributive experiences."[84] His objection applies not only to the special case of the absolute – the all-encompassing all-knower – but also to the case of the finite mind insofar as it is an aggregate of finite experiences. Royce had argued for the logical necessity of the absolute on the basis of his understanding of cognition; James counters on exactly the same ground.

The bulk of the incoherence argument is found in lecture 5, "The Compounding of Consciousness," interspersed with an autobiographical account of James's own concerns and failures with this very problem in his *Principles of Psychology*. Unlike his earlier considerations of the absolute, which appeal to "rational" features with which he himself clearly agrees, his fundamental objections to the absolute in the Hibbert Lectures take place wholly under the auspices of intellectualism's presuppositions, some of which James is also questioning.[85] Earlier in the lectures he had criticized conceptual logic, when taken exclusively (and as metaphysically sufficient), for contributing to (the undesirable) vicious intellectualism. His strategy here is not only to banish the absolute, but also to suggest that its very "existence" philosophically arises from a "vicious" misapplication of conceptual logic taken in a rationalistic context. James's criticism is thus not only defensive, but also constructive, insofar as it implies an alternative, appropriate context or use for conceptual logic.[86]

Although James offers a number of objections from varying perspectives in his autobiographical account, he reduces this to one "objective" argument that turns initially on the philosophy of the absolute's commitment to idealism. The crucial aspect of idealism here is the (loosely)

[83] This identity-claim characteristic of *Identitätsphilosophie* appears to account for James's occasional use of the term "the logic of identity."

[84] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 93.

[85] To be precise, James is questioning *aspects* of the amalgam that is intellectualist logic: although he is challenging *in toto* the rationalistic bias toward concepts, he is only questioning the role of conceptual logic. At this point in the lectures, the idealist thesis remains unquestioned by James. He will eventually raise issues as to its metaphysical content.

[86] James's view of the appropriate use of conceptual logic is that accordance with its canons provides a necessary though not sufficient condition for something's being real. Given his fallibilism with regard to basic philosophical views (and the complexity of his own), this implies that virtually nothing positive can be deduced on the basis of logic alone (a view frequently taken in the twentieth century).

Berkeleian, empirico-idealistic claim that all existence has a perceptual or experiential character, and that this character precludes a distinction between what the existent is in itself and what it appears to be. This idealist provision, James observes, renders unintelligible the claim that the higher and the lower in the universe are simply entitatively identical, that the collective just is identical to the distributive, since the experience of the part most certainly is not the same as that of the whole.[87] The easy solution to this would seem to be to admit some sort of independent unifying agents such as souls, thus leaving one able to claim that at least the *material* unified in both the higher and lower is the same. Unfortunately, this "contradicts the idealist principle, of a mental fact being just what it appears to be."[88] Short of abandoning conceptual logic, which no absolute idealist since Hegel has (on James's view) been willing to do, the only way to retain the idealist principle, therefore, is to admit frankly that the alls and eaches are two distinct orders of witness. This, however, means giving up the absolute as such and giving way to some form of metaphysical and epistemological pluralism.

James's fifth lecture is easily misunderstood at this point, because he moves immediately from this internal criticism of the absolute to the articulation of a separate dilemma that appears to be between giving up conceptual logic on the one hand and facing the fact that life is irrational on the other.[89] Although such a dilemma itself involves an implicit criticism of the absolute, as I shall demonstrate below this latter dilemma is separate, being part and parcel of James's constructive solution to the broader problem of co-consciousness and the related issue of the compounding of consciousness. The important point to note here, therefore, is that James's internal criticism of the absolute does *not* depend on a rejection of conceptual logic. Instead, given rationalism's idealism, its prioritization of the conceptual order, and conceptual logic itself, James intends to force his contemporaries to embrace both metaphysical pluralism and a perspectival account of knowing in order to avoid incoherence. James's overall position against the absolute in *A Pluralistic Universe*, then, is not limited to advocating the mere preferability of one of two hypotheses. On the contrary, he also raises serious, critical questions as to whether transcendental monism in its post-Hegelian form even constitutes a coherent, much less an empirically or "rationally" adequate, hypothesis.[90]

[87] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 90–1. [88] Ibid., p. 91. [89] See ibid., pp. 91–5.

[90] Interestingly, James's criticism here does not touch Hegel, since he himself claimed to give up standard logic in the form involved here.

THE PROBLEM OF THE COMPOUNDING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

When I characterized James's Hibbert Lectures as a whole, I mentioned that lectures 2, 3, and 5 can be understood to be concerned with both a "diagnosis" and a "case history" of the then contemporary state of health of spiritualistic philosophy. In addition to criticizing the views of his contemporary opponents, James devotes some time in his lectures to a discussion of the principal historical "source" of transcendental monism, namely, Hegel. In this James pursues two separate interests: first, because of his concern for spiritualistic philosophy, he wants to identify the positive contribution Hegel made that turned philosophy in a spiritualistic direction; second, he is also interested in discerning where and how Hegel also led spiritualistic philosophy (and rationalism in particular) astray.

James's estimation of Hegel is more appreciative than one might expect. For example, he finds Hegel to be an inspired reporter of certain empirical aspects of the world, one who runs "thick" with regard to fact, but is unfortunately led astray from his most perceptive observations by the rationalistic bent of his technique and world-view. Hegel's empirical vision was thus keen on James's reading, but unfortunately, he and his followers could not restrain themselves from the siren call of rationalism's preference for concepts over fact, and the whole over the parts.[91] From James's perspective Hegel's principal philosophical contribution is the recognition that things are dialectic, that there is a dialectic movement in things and reality as such. The metaphysical formulation of this that Hegel left as his legacy was the recognition that what is philosophically true or rational must be something that is its own other – something that is autonomous (*selbständig*), something that can produce or provide its own dynamic (movement) for itself.

This recognition of the dialectical movement in reality, along with the necessity of articulating a dialectical nature for things, relates directly to the vexing question for James of how consciousness (or any other complex "entity") can be understood to compound into higher aggregates or syntheses. Although this sort of problem appears in many places, it emerges most critically when one attempts to articulate the dialectical dynamic that accounts for knowing (taken as a state of mind), in light of the idealist principle that there is to be admitted no

[91] This seems unfair to Hegel, since he had an extremely rich understanding of concepts. James's point is, however, that Hegel placed little *value* in the manifold concrete determinations that do not themselves flow from the Notion.

real difference between appearance and reality.[92] To take an example from Bradley that illustrates one facet of the broader problem, when one looks at a speckled hen as a whole, the resulting experience does not admit of any finite number of speckles. Rather, it is an experience or a knowing of a "speckled hen" with no particular number of speckles. On the idealistic (or monistic) account, however, things are simply supposed to be as they appear or are experienced. Therefore, one of two things should be the case. Either the experience of the whole "speckled hen" should hold, and the number of speckles should be absolutely indeterminate; or the experience should be of a hen with a particular number of speckles. The hen, however, obviously admits of a finite number of speckles while the aggregate (or higher) experience does not. Since the two experiences seem to exclude one another, how can one account for the dialectical relation between them? Put another way, the problem of the compounding of consciousness is to show how each experience "contains" actual relations that are productive (or constitutive) of both its similarity (aggregation) to and its difference (individuation) from other experiences.

The problem is crucial to James in *A Pluralistic Universe* for numerous reasons. First, he has thrown in his lot with the intimacy that results from spiritualistic philosophies by taking God and the world to be of the same order and "substance." Thus in some sense he embraces the "idealist thesis" (which in his system is expressed in the thesis of pure experience). Additionally, although James does not share the (rationalistic) metaphysics that Hegel or philosophers of the absolute do, he does share with them the interest in understanding the world to be dynamic, or dialectically in motion. Further, James, too, wants to identify and account for an understanding of metaphysical autonomy, although for him it is fully placed at the level of the parts rather than at the whole as it is with Hegel.

Given these congruences, James lauds Hegel for identifying the critical problem. Not surprisingly, however, he also deems Hegel a failure. A rationalist through and through, Hegel had approached the issue conceptually by trying to show how the Concept (or the Notion) could logically produce or lead to its own other through the dialectic method (which James calls the method of double-negation). Hegel is thus seen

[92] Interestingly, the question also arises for materialists, at least insofar as they take mind to be epiphenomenal. (This is, in fact, how James first takes it up in *Principles*.) The compounding issue emerges, then, for any metaphysical monism that attempts to account for motion, activity, or change in the world.

by James to proffer a merely conceptual, and rather "thin," solution to the problem of the dialectic nature of reality, ultimately abandoning reality for the realm of concepts.[93] Given that James seeks a "thick," concrete, radically empiricist philosophy of experience, merely conceptual solutions cannot be seen adequately to address the issue as it appears in real experience.[94]

Well back into James's preparatory work on *Principles of Psychology*, the problem of the compounding of consciousness – from simple, particular states into higher, more complex states of mind – had been vexing. The problem arose in *Principles* in relation to a variety of materialist and idealist explanations of the constitution of higher states of mind, all of which considered the higher states somehow simply to consist of lower states, combined.[95] In *Principles* James had found himself unable to make sense of that position. Instead, he had advocated the view that higher states of mind are new and singular mental states, knowing or referring to the previous, simpler states, but not simply consisting of or being identical to them.[96] James's account of "the stream of thought" (or "consciousness") thus allowed him to avoid the logical problem of the "compounding" theories manifest in the obvious experiential differences between higher and lower states. As a result, he was able to articulate a view adequate to the special science of psychology. Unfortunately, though the logical and psychological problems were solved in *Principles*, his solution came at the expense of something he very much wished to retain, namely, common sense's "direct" realism and its shared world of multiple knowers.[97] The new philosophical

[93] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 34.

[94] James lauds Hegel for one other accomplishment which is also double-edged: his abandonment of conceptual logic for a dialectic logic. James notes with some glee that none of Hegel's followers adopted his procedure, while all of them adopted the rationalistic character of his vision. James himself is more interested in the empirical side of the vision and the logical aspects of the procedure (which he finds more adequately accounted for by pluralism). See ibid., pp. 96, 43, 45.

[95] This applies to reductionist views such as medical materialism, which see mind as epiphenomenal, as well as full-blooded idealisms, which see matter as merely another form of mind. One specific example James has in mind is the then-popular mind-dust theory; however, the generalities of the view are more common.

[96] James provides a relatively clear account of his own view at the time of *Principles* in lecture 5 of *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 85–90. It is important to recall that his solution in *Principles* assumes mind/matter dualism, and thus does not explicitly adhere to the monistic version of the idealist thesis that he holds to under radical empiricism.

[97] This problem occurs primarily because of James's endorsement of mind/matter dualism (as opposed to some form of monism – either reductive materialism or idealism) in *Principles*. For James there, psychology and the account of knowing take place wholly on the mental side of the divide, without any *explanation* of how the physical causes (or relates to) the mental (though

problem broached, then, was how to provide a logically coherent account that would link the individual strongly to the world, and in so doing, also make comprehensible the shared world of ordinary experience. In short, in *Principles* James managed to articulate a logically coherent view of the compounding of consciousness, but only at the expense of courting solipsism.[98]

In the autobiographical section of lecture 5 of the Hibbert Lectures (discussed earlier in connection with the absolute), James recounts in some detail his concerns when he was formulating the position taken in *Principles*.[99] Although in 1908 he still holds out for the limited value of his solution there, he admits that it is workable neither in finite psychology nor, *a fortiori*, in metaphysics.[100] James's view in *Principles* had the advantage of not succumbing to the problem of numerous materialists and idealists, namely, yielding to the seduction of the metaphors of either a grammatical sentence or a compound physical object (as understood by materialistic science).[101] However, James's overtly pluralistic stream of thought could not itself be said to have represented a coherent notion of the "identity of the collective and distributive," at least not one that could satisfy the spiritualistic philosophical goals in which James is interested in his Hibbert Lectures. "Shall we say," James writes,

> that every complex mental fact is a separate psychic entity *succeeding upon* a lot of other psychic entities which are erroneously called its parts, and superseding them in function, but not literally being composed of them? This was the course I took in my psychology; and if followed in theology, we should have to deny the absolute as usually conceived, and replace it by the "God" of theism. We should also have to deny Fechner's "earth-soul" and all other superhuman collections of experience of every grade, so far at least as these are held to be compounded of our simpler souls in the way which Fechner

James assumes that it does, on the basis of the psycho-physical principle). If one endorses monism, then both direct realism and a shared world are unproblematic, since thoughts are just of the same stuff as things, and there is no metaphysical chasm to be bridged. James's early account of the compounding of consciousness, however, makes no effort at illuminating the question of "objective reference," and thus since it cannot clarify the conditions under which one can be said to know (veridically) one external object, a world of shared objects or other knowers remains problematic.

98 Solipsism is not itself problematic from within a psychological perspective, but it does make the metaphysical or philosophical task of accounting for psychology as a special science more problematic. See chapter 2 for discussion of this issue.

99 See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 85–7.

100 Ibid., p. 87.

101 Ibid., pp. 87, 93. Cf. James's criticism of the understanding of relations in "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 24, discussed in chapter 1.

> believed in; and we should have to make all these denials in the name of the incorruptible logic of self-identity, teaching us that to call a thing and its other the same is to commit the crime of self-contradiction.[102]

The issues lost to conceptual logic are not only those of interest to spiritualistic philosophy, for James goes on to note in the next paragraph that the routine continuity between even simple, successive feelings, much less that mounting to the absolute, becomes "an unintelligible miracle." The solution of James's psychology, then, does not even account in any meaningful philosophical sense for the continuity in the stream of thought; rather, it simply begs it by saying that successive states of mind just do "refer" to preceding ones.

In chapter 2 I traced the early modulations of James's thought away from certain aspects of the position articulated in *Principles* and toward what eventually became known as radical empiricism. James's first move in 1895 in "The Knowing of Things Together" was to reject his psychological notion that higher mental states are singular, thus moving himself back squarely into the logical fray over how states of consciousness can be understood simply to form higher states out of lower ones by combining. James's next move in confronting this issue was to reject mind/matter dualism, thereby allowing for a relatively monistic, functional explanation of the possibility of the compounding of consciousness that does not require (at least not in every instance) a representational theory of mind. Although this move did not address the logical issues, it did permit him to make significant forays into a direct-realist epistemology. The field-theory explanations of 1895 from "The Feelings," along with the thesis of pure experience and the presumption of the factuality of relations broached then and unveiled publicly in the 1904 articles, can in this context be seen as further explorations aimed at least in part at addressing the logical problem of the compounding of consciousness.

When James unveiled his radical empiricism in the 1904–5 *Journal of Philosophy* "series," both the issue of the compounding of consciousness and the related problem of solipsism (or of direct realism and a shared world) were on his mind. "Does Consciousness Exist?" goes straight to the issue of the compounding of consciousness, as well as James's direct epistemological view, while "The Thing and its Relations" and "How Two Minds Can Know One Thing" pursue the philosophical issues that I am construing broadly as having to do with co-consciousness or

[102] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 93–4.

a shared world.[103] That James himself remained unsatisfied with the position in those articles, however, is clear from the notebooks he kept between 1905 and 1908 on Dickinson Miller's and B. H. Bode's objections to his articles on radical empiricism.

James opens the first notebook in 1905 with a lucid statement of the contradiction between the "singular mental field" view of *Principles* (abandoned in 1895, but logically unproblematic), and the doctrine of radical empiricism that the same pure experience can (in part) constitute two different fields or experiences. "How can I rescue the situation?" he writes; "Which doctrine must I stand by?"[104] Several pages later, James refines his formulation of the logical problem with the second doctrine, radical empiricism: "The concrete trouble is over the question: can the same terminus be co [continuous with] me & ex [ejective to] me at the same time? Or can my experience be the same in me and in the world soul, when obviously the world soul's edition of it is so different from mine?"[105] In other words, how can we make sense of a shared object being one way in character with reference to your knowing, another with reference to mine, and still autonomous in some sense in terms of its own content or particularity (as a condition of its being able to be experienced variously)?

One might respond to James at this point that his overt presumption of the reality of relations, suggested in 1895 and stated in the factual thesis of radical empiricism, renders this objection moot, since insofar as relations, both conjunctive and disjunctive, are simply taken to be real, there is no "unintelligible miracle" or "concrete trouble" remaining. This is partly true. However, because radical empiricism itself is a reflective view of the world, it must be admitted to be constructed through conceptual processes. Given James's understanding of the abstracting, disjunctive nature of the process of conception (its "cutting out" from the flux), and his further understanding that this disjunctive view is reflected in conceptual logic, all of radical empiricism's analyses must themselves be understood to disjoin in the process of conception what they claim is either conjoined or disjoined in fact.[106] How, then, could one ever distinguish a relation of conjunction that is factual in a philosophical view? In other words, if things are as they are experienced, and they always are experienced as disjoined in

[103] See these and related articles in James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism.*

[104] James, "The Miller–Bode Objections," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, p. 65. [105] Ibid., p. 68.

[106] One might well object to James's understanding of standard logic, and to his giving in to its intellectualist formulation. This is, however, the view he has of the situation at this point.

conception (reflectively), then why assume with the factual thesis that they can be conjoined in fact? It is clear from this that if radical empiricism does not contextualize conceptual logic in some fashion, it, too, will remain unable to provide a satisfactory philosophical account of conjunction for the problem of the compounding of consciousness, much less the simultaneous conjunction and disjunction characteristic of co-consciousness. Radical empiricism may be a step in the right direction, but, at least in its 1904–5 formulation, it is not yet an adequate theoretical alternative.

The notations covering the first eleven months of the Miller–Bode notebooks wrestle with the basic tension between, on the one hand, James's desire for a monistic, *dynamic* metaphysics that allows both direct (although perspectival) knowing and a shared world, and on the other hand, his logical scruples over articulating a reasonable and coherent account of the compounding of consciousness and the sharing of objects, given his understanding of conceptual logic. By 12 September 1906 James had begun to entertain seriously the thought that his problem was not merely logical; rather, he thought it had to do with the "metaphysical" nature of logic, or more accurately, his understanding of conceptual logic and its relation to reality itself:

> May not my whole trouble be due to the fact that I am still treating what is really a living and dynamic situation by logical and statical categories? If life be anywhere active, and if its activity be an ultimate characteristic, inexplicable by aught lower or simpler, I ought not to be afraid to postulate activity and all that it involves in my account of all this mental union of the nevertheless distinct.[107]

On James's developing view, both logic and conceptual activity should be seen as operating within a broader, fundamentally dynamic context, one which itself may subscribe to a different "rationality" (or even several different rationalities).[108] Maintaining some perspective on the particular context relevant to conceptual logic, James thinks, may therefore provide a means of articulating the compounding of consciousness while also satisfying his other philosophical goals.

This sort of insight proves to be central to James's argument in *A Pluralistic Universe*. In that text he offers several refinements to his radical empiricism, one of which ultimately requires conceptual logic (or intellectual rationality) to take its place beside other sorts of rational

[107] James, "The Miller–Bode Objections," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, p. 104.
[108] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 38, discussed above with reference to the absolute.

"insights," such as those of the aesthetic, moral, and practical arenas he identifies in speaking of a balance of rationality.[109] James indicates as much when he reflects on what we must give up if we just meet the logical objections raised at the beginning of the Miller–Bode notebooks on their own ground:

> But if we realize the whole philosophic situation thus produced, we see that it is almost intolerable. Loyal to the logical kind of rationality, it is disloyal to every other kind. It makes the universe discontinuous. These fields of experience that replace each other so punctually, each knowing the same matter, but in ever-widening contexts, from simplest feeling up to absolute knowledge, *can* they have no *being* in common when their cognitive function is so manifestly common? The regular succession of them is on such terms an unintelligible miracle . . . The resultant irrationality is really intolerable.[110]

The recognition of such a situation, apparently irrational and untrue to the complexity of actual human experience, forces one into a dilemma. "Can we, on the one hand, give up the logic of identity?" James asks. "Can we, on the other, believe human experience to be fundamentally irrational? Neither is easy, yet it would seem that we must do one or the other."[111] This dilemma is clearly not the same as that discussed earlier of the transcendental monist, who was forced to choose between pluralism and the complex intellectualist logic. Instead, this dilemma forces a choice between the supremacy of conceptual logic and the "rationality" (or intimacy) of experience itself – or as James puts it later, between logic and life.

Immediately following this, James indicates his own intentions, weaving a course between the horns of the dilemma:

> For my own part, I have finally found myself compelled to *give up the logic*, fairly, squarely, and irrevocably . . . I prefer bluntly to call reality if not irrational then at least non-rational in its constitution – and by reality I mean where things *happen*, all temporal reality without exception.[112]

Given my earlier discussion of intimacy and rationality, as well as the context of the problem of the compounding of consciousness, James's

109 For the import of "insight," see ibid., p. 110, discussed above in the discussion of intimacy. The fourfold view of rationality is discussed in the section on the absolute.

110 Ibid., p. 94.

111 Ibid., p. 96. James characterizes it initially as a trilemma, with the possibility of giving up psychology without a soul (returning to soul-driven psychologies) as a third option. He does not, however, expect anyone to do that, nor does he see that as plausible, given his methodological thesis of radical empiricism.

112 Ibid., pp. 96–7.

self-characterized "queer and dark" comments here about giving up the logic and admitting reality to be "non-rational" cannot exactly be called either a wholesale rejection of conceptual logic or an embracing of irrationality, as many have suggested. Instead, his move might more aptly be understood as a *contextualization* of logic and a corresponding *expansion* of the notion of rationality. Like any other mental function, for James logic must be understood to be limited or contextualized by its practical goals and its dynamic functions; correspondingly, our overall conception of rationality must be expanded beyond the mere logic of "knowledge about" and into the realm of "direct acquaintance." As such, rationality for James is not taken to be equivalent to conceptual logic, but rather is understood broadly to conform to the twofold taking of intimacy (phenomenological and metaphysical, or in both intentions) as I explicated it above. The solution James embraces in *A Pluralistic Universe* – namely, opening up his radically empiricist *Weltanschauung* beyond the limits prescribed by conceptual logic – thus at least potentially squares away the logical objections to radical empiricism's view of the compounding of consciousness raised by Miller and Bode. Making practical sense of such a view – articulating and maintaining its balance of rationality – is, however, the real challenge.

James confesses in the Hibbert Lectures that the decisive factor in his decision to subordinate conceptual logic to fact (or reality) was his encounter with Henri Bergson's radical critique of intellectualism. Lecture 6, which follows immediately upon this dilemma, is a discussion of Bergson's critique and vision, as well as an introductory glimpse of the philosophical alternative to transcendental monism that James proposes. James's interest in Bergson is focused on the French philosopher's interpretation of intellectual activity, or conception, as having a fundamentally practical rather than theoretical (or intellectual) value:

> altho by means of concepts cut out from the sensible flux of the past, we can re-descend upon the future flux and, making another cut, say what particular thing is likely to be found there; and that altho in this sense concepts give us knowledge and may be said to have some theoretic value . . . yet in the deeper sense of giving *insight* they have no theoretic value, for they quite fail to connect us with the inner life of the flux, or the real causes that govern its direction. Instead of being interpreters of reality, concepts negate the inwardness of reality altogether.[113]

[113] Ibid., p. 110.

The problem with conceptual thinking, and by extension, rationalist philosophy, is not that it is false, much less useless. Conceptual thinking on both Bergson's and James's views proceeds by "cutting out" particular contents from the flux of experience and then linking them through external relations with other individuated contents or aspects. Such an activity is highly practical precisely because of its narrow focus and potential specificity. At the same time, however, conceptual thinking is by its nature limited both to describing relations as only separate and external, and to articulating all contents of experience as radically singular. On James's view, however, relations of both continuity and discontinuity factually can in principle be both internal and external to pure experience. By its defining character, then, conceptual thinking is fundamentally unable fully to express or explore this "manyness at once," this saturated complexity that James finds characteristic of the flux of experience as it comes in human life.[114] Therefore, when conceptual thought is taken to be the *exclusive* method, arbiter, and goal of inquiry generally, the enterprise of philosophy, which James in 1892 had characterized as attaining "the maximum of possible insight into the world as a whole," is severely handicapped.[115]

Although he agrees with Bergson in significant detail about the principal functions and characteristics of conceptual thinking, James ultimately parts company with him concerning the potential theoretical value of conception. Bergson's critique is radical in that he allows *no* value whatsoever other than a practical value to conception or intellectual thinking. James's fourfold understanding of rationality (as moral,

[114] James gives several examples of the limitations of logical analysis in characterizing the world of fact (although he provides little analysis of them), which are quite suggestive of thorny problems. One, for example, has to do with the lack of fit between the conceptual understanding of the present moment and the passing of time: "Past and future, for example, conceptually separated by the cut to which we give the name of the present, and defined as being the opposite sides of that cut, are to some extent, however brief, co-present with each other throughout experience. The literally present moment is a purely verbal supposition, not a position; the only present ever concretely realized being the 'passing moment' in which the dying rearward of time and its dawning future forever mix their lights" (ibid., p. 113). Pointing out the influence of practical interest and context, and the problems with comparison (involved in transitivity), James also brings up an example of how identity is discerned between similars, and how this depends on variable constraints or parameters of comparison: "Two tones, neither by itself distinguishable from a third tone, are perfectly distinct from each other" (p. 115). See ibid., pp. 111–17, for the whole series of arguments and examples. See Hilary Putnam's "Vagueness and Alternative Logic," *Philosophical Papers, Volume 3: Realism and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), for a contemporary discussion of similar problems of comparison and vagueness in conception and logic, and the (contextual) dependence of logic on metaphysics.

[115] James, *Psychology: Briefer Course*, p. 396.

aesthetic, intellectual, and practical) and his experience with the pragmatic method lead him, however, to be more circumspect than Bergson, ultimately admitting a theoretical value for conceptual thought as well:

> One can easily get into a verbal mess at this point, and my own experience with "pragmatism" makes me shrink from the dangers that lie in the word "practical"; so, far rather than to stand out against you for that word, I am quite willing to part company with Professor Bergson, and to ascribe a primarily theoretical function to our intellect, provided you on your part then agree to discriminate "theoretic" or scientific knowledge from the deeper "speculative" knowledge aspired to by most philosophers, and concede that theoretic knowledge, which is knowledge *about* things, as distinguished from living contemplation or sympathetic acquaintance with them, touches only the outer surface of reality.[116]

All knowledge about, then, does not necessarily have to have a proximate, practical value (although most of it, in fact, does). Thus there can be "pure science," or purely intellectual pursuits.[117] These pursuits, however, still do not escape the procedural limitations and perspectival biases generated by their conceptual procedure; therefore, they cannot alone be deemed adequate to a philosophy that seeks to be sympathetic. For James, a speculative philosophy that seeks *insight* must therefore attend both to our other modality of knowing (direct acquaintance) and our other forms of rationality (aesthetic and moral).[118]

James's rhetoric in *A Pluralistic Universe* is occasionally bombastic, and easily misunderstood when taken out of context. However, when seen in light of his critique of intellectualism and the problems raised by both Miller and Bode, James's appeal via Bergson to the "inwardness of reality" and the "immediate experience of life" is clearly not a wholesale anti-rational move, but rather a balancing or recalibration of the whole philosophical enterprise, as well as a *refinement* of his 1904–5 statement of radical empiricism. This recalibration seeks to restore conceptual thought to its "proper," practical context. In so doing, it re-attends in radical empiricism to the modality of knowing by direct

[116] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 111. See also the note, pp. 122–4.

[117] This knowing is a species of the "virtual knowing" discussed in the section on the pragmatic conception of truth in chapter 1. (It could also admit of practical value, and when that is the case, the practical value outweighs the theoretical for James, since the interest at stake dominates the perspective.) Cf. James's discussion of the "beyond" in "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 43.

[118] "Theoretical" and "speculative" derive respectively from the Greek and Latin words for seeing. James is playing on the modern appropriation of theory to science, in opposition to the scholastic and theological uses of "speculative."

acquaintance, and by extension, to the factual relatedness and metaphysical complexity of the flux of pure experience. "Direct acquaintance and conceptual knowledge are thus complementary of each other," James writes; "each remedies the other's defects."[119] The real problem is not conceptual logic itself, then, but rather the hegemony resultant from conceptual logic when it is exclusively extended to the whole philosophical enterprise, and thus made prescriptive of the whole of reality.

How, one might ask, does this move solve the problems of the compounding of consciousness and of co-consciousness for James? The crucial point is that in relativizing conceptual logic primarily (although not exclusively) to the practical application of concepts, James has made way for an important extension of the philosophical import of the factual thesis of radical empiricism. Instead of subordinating that thesis to the disjunctive modality of conception (as James understands it), conceptual logic can instead be subordinated to the factual thesis in its full sense, which holds that relations, both conjunctive and disjunctive, are real parts of pure experience, and thus are known through direct acquaintance. Speaking of Bergson's work along this line, James notes that Bergson inverts the "traditional platonic doctrine" of the value of intellectual knowledge: "Instead of the intellectual knowledge being the profounder, he calls it the more superficial."[120] On this rendering concepts and intellectual knowledge must earn their valuation by virtue of their contributions to rationality; on the other hand, on this radically empiricist view the flux is given the greater benefit of the doubt.

Given this relativization, the solution to both the problem of the compounding of consciousness and that of co-consciousness is quite simple: the problem literally dissolves. According to the factual thesis of radical empiricism, and treated "as it comes," the flux may in fact be both "co" (continuous) and "ex" (ejective) at the same time; one bit of pure experience is simply related in various, independent ways, both conjunctively and disjunctively, to multiple other distributive and collective bits of experience:

What makes you call real life confusion is that it presents, *as if they were dissolved in one another*, a lot of differents which retrospective conception breaks life's

[119] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 112.

[120] Ibid., p. 112. James is, once again, being a bit flamboyant. Cf. James, *Pragmatism*, p. 123, for the value of our adding to the flux conceptually.

flow by keeping apart. But *are* not differents actually dissolved in one another? Hasn't every bit of experience its quality, its duration, its extension, its intensity, its urgency, its clearness, and many aspects besides, no one of which can exist in the isolation in which our verbalized logic keeps it? They exist only *durcheinander*.[121]

The fabric of experience, then, is concatenous, interconnected edge to edge like James's mosaic metaphor, flowing at times *durcheinander* (one through another), while at other moments and places merely being strung-along piecemeal.[122] As such, multiple collectives out of the same distributive bits are possible. Further, the cuts that are made in this fabric conceptually must be seen to be arbitrary to a degree, in that they are not necessarily "natural" to the pure experience itself, but rather at least in part subordinate to the variable interests and contexts of our conceptual enterprises.[123] With logic so relativized, the factual thesis of radical empiricism means in a strong sense that pure experience contains whatever relations it contains – regardless of conceptual logic's limitations in ascertaining those relations all in a single description (because of its inherent perspectivalism and its disjunctive character). Contra Hume, James declares that "Distinctions may be insulators in logic as much as they like, but in life distinct things can and do commune together every moment."[124]

On the basis of this contextualization, what one might call "Hegel's problem" of how something can be its own other is also dissolved:

Not only the absolute is its own other, but the simplest bits of immediate experience are their own others, if that hegelian phrase be once for all allowed. The concrete pulses of experience appear pent in by no such definite limits as our conceptual substitutes for them are confined by.[125]

[121] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 114.

[122] James's use of the term *durcheinander* (literally "one through another") in *Pluralistic Universe* is interesting and important. On the one hand, James holds that the various aspects and relations of discrete bits of pure experience are just experienced in the first intention (through direct acquaintance) as *durcheinander*, flowing one through another, simultaneously (see p. 114). On the other hand, he claims that reality in the second intention, reality taken on the whole, is seen by radical empiricism neither as *alleinheit* nor even as *durcheinander*, but rather as "strung-along" piecemeal (see p. 147). James appears to have in mind Royce's argument of co-implication, which he wants to avoid by denying the indiscriminate attribution of this sort of absolute interpenetration at every level of aggregation. The world might be *durcheinander* overall, and the absolute might well exist, but that depends on what one can actually find to be consistent with the course of real experience. See the following sections on pluralistic panpsychism and the superhuman consciousness for more detail.

[123] Thus fallibilism is given a metaphysical explanation.

[124] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 116.

[125] Ibid., p. 127. Hegel's problem then really turns out to be merely the problem of articulating a philosophical view wherein conceptual logic does not contravene real life.

On this view, then, it is at least potentially the case that the absolute and the individual – that Royce's cat and King – are immediately related, concatenous, and perhaps even overlapping. This leaves open the possibility for a bit of pure experience or even a collective of associates to be part of one individual's field of experience as well as another's. Whether pure experiences or contents are related simply depends on what, in fact, happens to be the case in the field of pure experience. By treating conception (and thus conceptual logic) functionally and pragmatically, then, James has made more philosophically comprehensible and unproblematic (although also contingent on fact) the compounding of consciousness crucial to the psychological problem. The same holds for a world of many knowers and a shared world of contents and objects.

PLURALISTIC PANPSYCHISM

On such a radically empiricist reading, the orderly world of the rationalist is transformed into a rather multifarious, "gothic" sort of place, full of interconnections and overlaps that we do not necessarily expect conceptually, and potentially far exceeding the limits of our spheres of action, conception, and ultimately, sympathy. To evaluate it in terms of James's fourfold conception of rationality, James may have avoided the problem of evil and error, and he may have increased the potential for practical rationality, but it is not clear by any means that he has as yet increased the degree of moral or aesthetic rationality. And although this view makes the world intellectually comprehensible as it is experienced, it also makes it potentially less predictable. Insofar as James is seeking to articulate a spiritualistic philosophy corresponding to a sympathetic rather than a cynical temper, whence comes the sympathy and, by extension, the hope? In other words, in what way does radical empiricism pursue its commitment to intimacy in the second intention, intimacy as an ideal?

In recontextualizing logic and the process of conception pragmatically, James intends not only to counter objections to his own views, but also to alter significantly the basic metaphysical model of reality itself – the basic model of what the world is like – as well as to indicate a different role for philosophy from that accorded to any of the "special sciences." James's shift in the 1890s to the inherently complex and ambidextrous term "experience" as his fundamental conception made some headway in this. In *A Pluralistic Universe*, however, he takes this

even further, articulating a dynamic, vivid, and flowing reality as that with which our philosophical efforts ought to engage:

> What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making. Once made, they are dead, and an infinite number of alternative conceptual decompositions can be used in defining them. But put yourself *in the making* by a stroke of intuitive sympathy with the thing and, the whole range of possible decompositions coming at once into your possession, you are no longer troubled with the question which of them is the more absolutely true. Reality *falls* in passing into conceptual analysis; it *mounts* in living its own undivided life – it buds and burgeons, changes and creates. Once adopt the movement of this life in any given instance and you know what Bergson calls the *devenir réel* by which the thing evolves and grows. Philosophy should seek this kind of living understanding of the movement of reality, not follow science in vainly patching together fragments of its dead results.[126]

If the "scientific," mechanistic model of a static world, with its fixed and predictable relations and occurrences, is not by itself adequate to the full range of actual human experience, then what alternative can a sympathetic, radically empiricist philosophy offer? James's answer lies in his pluralistic panpsychism.

It is important to underscore at the outset that James does *not* advocate embracing a philosophy that cannot account for the various enterprises of the special sciences, natural and otherwise. That, in fact, is one problem he himself sees with most forms of idealism. On the contrary, he seeks a philosophy that *both* can account for the practical successes of the sciences and can value and provide insight into our moral and religious sentiments and experiences, as well as our basic sense of life. Radical empiricism, with its full-blooded empiricist demeanor and its pragmatic understanding of conception and truth, can provide adequate space for the sciences. Rendered as a form of pluralistic panpsychism, James thinks, radical empiricism is capable of entertaining the other kinds of rationality and experience as well. Additionally, in contrast to the 1904–5 articulation, such a refined view has the philosophical benefit of allowing for more straightforward and detailed *positive* explanations of the compounding of consciousness, the phenomenon of co-consciousness, and the effects of our cognitive and practical activities.[127]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, panpsychism was a relatively common metaphysical view – one shared, in fact, by numerous of James's colleagues. Although there is no clear and easy

[126] Ibid., pp. 117–18.
[127] The recontextualization of logic is in some ways a negative explanation, in that it removes the objection to the phenomenon without explaining exactly how it is to be understood.

definition that encompasses all of those who are normally regarded as panpsychists, at a minimum panpsychism involves the claim that all objects of the universe have an inner, psychical aspect or disposition.[128] Panpsychism is not merely the view that matter is intrinsically active (hylozoism), but is a somewhat stronger statement involving the inherently evaluative idea of a slightly "higher," psychical activity as a potentiality of all that is. The universe is therefore not only rendered active intrinsically, but is also animated in some fashion at the level of its parts.[129] Panpsychism in any form is thus a refined species of spiritualistic philosophy that demonstrates a somewhat empiricist bent in James's sense, in that it attends primarily to the parts and secondarily to the whole.

Numerous versions of panpsychism are possible. For my purposes here it is worth while to distinguish a strong and a weak version.[130] On the strong interpretation, panpsychism requires that every individuable element in the universe that is real or existent must be, at a minimum, self-experiencing or self-conscious, in addition to whatever other psychic and physical relations it may contain or engage. This version of panpsychism (held to a significant degree by James's friend Charles Strong) is usually invoked as a means of accounting for what I have called the dialectical nature of existence or being, or what Strong, drawing on Kant, calls "the thing in itself."[131] This strong version, therefore, allows one to interpret robustly the independence of objects in the universe without necessarily compromising a commitment to idealism. In his 1906–7 "General Problems of Philosophy" course, James names this view "idealistic panpsychism," clarifying further that from this perspective, "not only is the mental aspect called the more *real* aspect of things, but it is the more *active* aspect also."[132]

[128] Paul Edwards characterizes panpsychism as involving the claim that "all objects of the universe have inner or psychical being." He includes Fechner, Royce, Lotze, Clifford, Renouvier, Wundt, Strong, Peirce, Schiller, and Paulsen – all colleagues of James in some manner – as being panpsychists, but he explicitly excludes James himself. See "Panpsychism," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. VI, pp. 22–31. Edwards is unsatisfied with the weaker formulation of Rudolph Eisler, who describes panpsychism as involving the assertion that matter merely has a disposition toward the psychic. See Eisler, *Wörterbuch der Philosophischen Begriffe*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Mittler & Sohn, 1929), vol. II, pp. 372–3.

[129] Using the verb "animate" to describe the term "psychical" simply invokes a cognate from Latin to describe a similar if not equivalent cognate from Greek. "Animated" in English does, however, involve a stronger notion of intrinsicalness than does the claim of mere "activity."

[130] As I shall articulate it, James's view does not conform exactly to either one of these.

[131] See Strong, *Why the Mind Has a Body*. It should be noted that Strong admits to a version of mental/physical dualism, as do most panpsychists of James's day.

[132] James, "Syllabus in Philosophy D: General Problems of Philosophy (1906–1907)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 396.

Weakly interpreted, panpsychism amounts to the claim that every element in the universe has a psychic aspect or disposition in addition to its other characteristics. What makes the version weak is the further stipulation that this psychic aspect is inert, or not responsible in any active way for the characteristics of concrete elements in the world. On this interpretation every metaphysical unit could, as in the strong version, be considered to be self-conscious or self-experiencing; however, there is an additional caveat that the actual, concrete being of any particular unit does not result from this self-consciousness. This view, then, amounts to a minor, weakly dialectical refinement of materialism. In his categorization in 1906–7, James calls this version "epiphenomenalism" and notes that it "violates . . . not only our sense of Life, but evolutionary probabilities."[133]

There is an even weaker version of such a view that would appear to be classifiable as a form of panpsychism. Interestingly, this position is suggested by James's own radical empiricism, at least when it is read in a relatively isolated context. Ignoring the thesis of pure experience, one could consider James's methodological thesis of radical empiricism only to imply that for anything to be granted metaphysical or philosophical status, it must in fact be experienced by something. Read in its weakest sense, this methodological thesis would be simply an admission that there is an empirical, epistemological restriction on what we can know, and thus, by extension, on what can be included in a thoroughgoing empirical philosophy. Clearly, such a view includes no commitment with respect to the relative activity or inertness of the mental or psychical aspect; rather, it merely admits that as *we* encounter the world, everything turns out to be experienced by something. In this form, this weakest view is not really metaphysical in the way that the other versions of panpsychism have been seen to be, since it neither comments on the active importance of the psychical aspect nor characterizes reality as dialectical in any particular way.[134]

Between the strong (idealistic) and weaker (epiphenomenal) forms of panpsychism, there is a great deal of philosophical and metaphysical terrain, some of which James himself stakes out during the first decade

[133] Ibid., p. 396. James appears to have in mind that evolution proceeds by both the effects of intentional action and causal, material circumstances.

[134] This is not an interpretation that I endorse, even as an interpretation of James's view of 1904–5. In 1905, for example, James states that (what I have called) the methodological thesis of radical empiricism actually flows out of the thesis of pure experience, thus suggesting that one can never read his radical empiricism this narrowly. See James, "The Experience of Activity," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 81.

of the 1900s. The history of his commitment to panpsychism is somewhat obscure, since he rarely wrote about the view directly before the brief but explicit commitments to it in *A Pluralistic Universe*. The first mention in his published works is in his 1881 "Reflex Action and Theism," where he notes in closing that all modern thought is converging on idealistic or panpsychic conclusions.[135] The next published mention is the tantalizing deferral at the end of "A World of Pure Experience," where James remarks that if the "beyond" (the fringe or margins) indicated by our experiences of leading (continuity) is not understood to be a future experience, it must at least be taken to be a "thing in itself" in Strong's sense, "an experience *for* itself whose relation to other things we translate into the action of molecules, ether-waves, or whatever else the physical symbols may be."[136] The following year in "The Experience of Activity," James makes another brief, positive remark about panpsychism, this time mentioning both Strong and Bergson, noting that he finds their views dissimilar.[137] After *A Pluralistic Universe* the only other published mention of panpsychism is in James's 1909 article for the *American Magazine*, "Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher,'" where he refers again to the general convergence toward a panpsychic view.[138]

James's unpublished manuscripts and lecture notes indicate a far greater engagement with various versions of panpsychism than do his published comments. They also suggest an answer to the question concerning when he became seriously interested in the doctrine. The notes for four of his courses, as well as five manuscripts, include references to it. The first two mentions, one dating from the early 1880s and the other from 1890–1, are rather cursory, if not at times also somewhat uncomprehending of the position.[139] The earliest of these references coincides roughly with a manuscript fragment, in which

[135] James, *Will to Believe*, p. 112.

[136] James, "A World of Pure Experience," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 43. This mention casts serious doubt on the plausibility of the weakest interpretation that seemed theoretically possible given James's methodological thesis of radical empiricism.

[137] James, "The Experience of Activity," *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 95.

[138] James, "Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher,'" *Essays in Psychical Research, The Works of William James*, Frederick Burkhardt and Fredson Bowers (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 374. A number of James's comments about pantheism could be read panpsychically, thus enlarging the published references. Where one would close the floodgate on this effort, however, is unclear.

[139] See James, "Notes for Philosophy 3: The Philosophy of Evolution (1879–1885)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 146, and "Notes for Philosophy 1: General Introduction to Philosophy (1890–1891)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 198.

James notes that the important point of the theory is that "It admits reality *extra mentem meam*," thus focusing on the problem of solipsism.[140] By 1903–4 James is engaging the view seriously with respect to his own thinking, and by the time of the 1906–7 introductory course, it is clear that he means to endorse his own version of it.[141]

The manuscripts and notes also provide two very telling discussions of panpsychism from the perspective of James's comments in *A Pluralistic Universe*. First, the 1905 Wellesley/Chicago/Glenmore notebook contains a separate, sustained reflection occasioned by his having read a recent book by Gerardus Heymans.[142] The reflection is ultimately inconclusive, but in it James is principally interested in figuring out how to modify Heymans's and Strong's panpsychism according to his own formally monistic thesis of pure experience. Heymans and Strong both embrace a mind/matter dualism, as well as privilege the mental by interpreting all causation as psychical. James's doctrine is that the mental/physical split is subsequent, sorted out on the basis of how experiences act or possess their properties. Given the apparent difference between the results of what we, *ex post facto*, determine to be mental and physical causation, James is here at some pains to make sense of the panpsychist claim that all (causal) activity is psychical.

Part of the difficulty for James is not succumbing to the temptation of reading mental/physical language as fundamental metaphysically. James himself falls prey to this in part here, proposing that "Experience as a whole consists of a mental system (in the more inclusive sense) one part of which forms *also* a physical system."[143] The problem with this formulation is not that it does not solve the apparent problem of causation (because it does), but rather that it suggests that every experience is *first* mental, and only second (potentially) physical. This conclusion is correct epistemologically (phenomenologically) on James's view, but there is no reason why it must be so metaphysically on the basis of radical empiricism. If James had said that "experience as a

[140] "Outside my thoughts." See James, "Panpsychism (1879–1880)," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, p. 179.

[141] In "Notes for Philosophy 20c: A Pluralistic Description of the World (1903–1904)," James indicates on the one hand that he takes panpsychism to be purely limited to psychical facts; on the other hand he indicates that it "leaves a minimum of opacity in things." See pp. 278, 308. See also "The Many and the One (1903–1904)," where James characterizes his view as part of the panpsychist picture, in *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, pp. 6, 43, 48, 55. The Wellesley/Chicago/Glenmore notes also mention panpsychism in the context of the proposed book outline; see "Appendix II" to James, *Pragmatism*, p. 296.

[142] The book is *Einführung in die Metaphysik auf Grundlage der Erfahrung* (Leipzig: Barth, 1905).

[143] James, "Heymans's Book (1905)," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, p. 223.

whole consists of an experiential system (in the more inclusive sense) one part of which also forms a physical system," he would have more adequately taken advantage of the ambidextrousness of his central notion of "experience." On this hypothetical formulation, the merely mental system would be a second subsystem of the system of experience, one where we would find non-physical "existents" such as unicorns.

In these reflections James does come up with a more ambidextrous formulation of the notion of causation, noting that the mental train of experiences that coincides with perceptual experience is both brain- and body-conditioned.[144] On this rendering, James finds that a single experience is (potentially) not only psychically conditioned but also energetically conditioned from outside of the chain of associates: "Energetic action is simply transeunt action – 'psychic causation' is simply immanent action. When to the immanent kind the transeunt kind is *added*, experience is of physical things."[145] This formulation is again refracted by the epistemological issues of temporality; however, from it one can see James distinguishing "psychic" activity from "energetic" activity based on factual continuity and discontinuity vis-à-vis the broader stream of experience, rather than on a metaphysical difference in kind. One can extend what he says by arguing that on his formally monistic radical empiricism, causal activity need not be considered to admit of two fundamentally different kinds; rather, one could rely on an ambidextrous notion of "activity," much as James defines pure experience (metaphysically), sorting out the differences in effect pragmatically. On a non-dualistic, pure-experience rendering of panpsychism, then, "psychic activity" should be understood to be as ambidextrous and as metaphysically basic as James's notion of "pure experience."[146] One result of this adaptation would be that both cognitive and practical activities could be understood (at least potentially) to be basic, productive, or effective activities in the world of pure experience taken in its first intention.

[144] Ibid., p. 223. [145] Ibid., p. 223.

[146] I should note explicitly that James does not come to a conclusion that is this clear; rather, his text suggests that he should go in this direction, even though it does not work it out. James's comment that "'Energetics,' in the physical sense, does n't mean a kind of causation, but a specification of what the causation brings about," supports this interpretation strongly. See James, "Heymans's Book (1905)," *Manuscript Essays and Notes*, p. 223. NB: The concluding passage of the 1906–7 "Syllabus in Philosophy D" seems to go against this non-dualistic interpretation, since in it James endorses Strong's and Heymans's interactionist views. The text for the course was Paulsen's, which is epiphenomenalist in its panpsychism. Thus I take James's endorsement to be limited to the matter covered in the course. He does not cover his own philosophy of pure experience in that syllabus. See James, "Syllabus in Philosophy D: General Problems of Philosophy (1906–1907)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 428.

In his 1906–7 syllabus for Philosophy D, "General Problems of Philosophy," James engages in several revealing discussions of panpsychism, focusing this time not so much on causation as on the overall philosophical (or even temperamental) orientation of the view. First, he distinguishes the two main types of panpsychism held by his colleagues, namely, epiphenomenalism (weak) and idealistic panpsychism (strong), expressing his estimation of the prospects and advantages of the latter. Later in the manuscript, in the context of discussing teleological interpretations of the universe, James poses the question of "whether panpsychism should be interpreted monistically or pluralistically":

> That is, is there *one all-inclusive purpose* harbored by a general world-soul, embracing all sub-purposes in its system? Or are there *many various purposes*, keeping house together as they can, with no overarching purpose to include them? In other words, are the different parts of matter "informed" by diverse souls that obey no one unifying principle, but work out their mutual harmony as best they can?[147]

In this quotation we see for the first time an indication of James's intention to pursue the "pluralistic panpsychism" that is also mentioned notably in *A Pluralistic Universe*. James does not here indicate anything in particular about whether (and if so how) this panpsychism will differ in detail from that of Strong or Heymans, even though he had suggested in the 1905 notebook that his understanding of panpsychism should differ. However, his suggestion does indicate that he sees panpsychism to be involved in his argument against the absolute, an argument to which we know he considered radical empiricism to be crucial.

James's explicit mentions of panpsychism in *A Pluralistic Universe* occur in his final lecture. Like many of his previous references, his comments are philosophically undeveloped; nonetheless, they do indicate overtly that he considered his own view in that text to be a form of panpsychism. James writes that "If Oxford men could be ignorant of anything, it might almost seem that they had remained ignorant of the great empirical movement towards a pluralistic panpsychic view of the universe, into which our own generation has been drawn."[148] Only a page later James declares that "We are indeed internal parts of God and not external creations, on any possible reading of the panpsychic system," thus specifying the affiliation of his own view.[149]

[147] James, "Syllabus in Philosophy D: General Problems of Philosophy (1906–1907)," *Manuscript Lectures*, p. 403.

[148] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 141–2. [149] Ibid., p. 143.

Before moving on to James's pluralistic rendering of God(s) and the centrality of panpsychism to that effort, I want to explore in slightly more detail what the thesis of pluralistic panpsychism contributes to his radically empiricist world-view. I also want to analyze the work it does for him implicitly in the argument of *A Pluralistic Universe*. From the discussion of James's various references to panpsychism, it should be clear that he does not subcribe to either of the weak views I indicated. Further, it also seems evident that James's position against dualism renders Strong's and Heymans's "interactionist" models somewhat inadequate, or at least inadequately presented. What, then, does James mean to indicate by advocating panpsychism himself?

As I argued above, the crux of James's "resolution" of the problems of co-consciousness and the compounding of consciousness in *A Pluralistic Universe* is his claim that reality in itself just is dialectic, that "the simplest bits of immediate experience are their own others," conceptual logic notwithstanding.[150] This means two things for James. First, at the level of immediate or pure experience, the modality of being is one of activity or flux: "What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making."[151] Second, from the perspective of reflection (or conceptual treatment in the second intention), that flux is treated as containing or being made up of contents and relations, both internal and external. As immediate, "what in them is relation and what is matter related is hard to discern."[152] In the second intention, however, this dynamism is recast through cutting out particular characteristics and expressing relations externally among them. Numerous of the relations so "expressed" in the second intention, in spite of their apparent externality (on account of the conceptual process), are relations that are actually internal to the pure or immediate state of experience in the first intention.[153] Thus what appears to break down into wholly external units in the second intention, i.e., contents and various discriminable relations, can potentially be accurately classified as immediate and internal in the first intention.[154] That is what James means by stating that immediate bits of experience simply are their own others.

The factual thesis of radical empiricism, attesting to the reality or factuality of conjunctive and disjunctive relations, was designed by

[150] Ibid., p. 127. [151] Ibid., p. 117. [152] Ibid., p. 127.

[153] See chapter 1 for further discussion of the difference between internal and external relations, and for how they vary and overlap in different takings.

[154] The factuality of this claim to internality is, as always, subject to testing in the course of future experience.

James to solve problems like that posed by the compounding of consciousness. Although the factual thesis alone does allow one to articulate what is meant by the compounding of consciousness, or identity in difference, by itself it does not provide any insight into what *metaphysical* conditions make that conceivable. Instead, it simply states that relations appearing in the second intention are to be treated as just as real as the contents treated there, thus leaving conceptual logic unchecked.

When the factual thesis of radical empiricism is conjoined with the thesis of pure experience, some headway on the metaphysical issue is gained. However, at least as I articulated it in chapter 1, the thesis of pure experience itself provides neither a full account of the dynamic or active character of reality nor an explanation of why reality appears (to James) to be static in the second intention.[155] As such, then, the pure experience thesis cannot account for any effective interchange from the level of the second intention back to the first, even though it posits it. The thesis of pluralistic panpsychism, however, yields an overt answer to both of these questions in its assertion of the fundamental activity of reality. Since the references to the flux of reality interspersed throughout the Hibbert Lectures convey precisely that metaphysical content, James's pluralistic panpsychism should therefore be understood (in part) to be a refinement of the thesis of pure experience that also makes more sense of the factual thesis of radical empiricism. Further, in *A Pluralistic Universe* itself James's panpsychic view must be seen to be intermeshed with his moral, religious, and philosophical reasons for preferring intimacy to foreignness at every level.

In addition to modulating panpsychism into what one might call a "moderate," non-dualistic view, James represents his own panpsychism as pluralistic.[156] As I indicated in the discussion of the 1906–7 syllabus above, his principal interest in the "pluralistic" side of the expression relates to his objections to the absolute:

> Pragmatically interpreted, pluralism or the doctrine that it [the universe] is many means only that the sundry parts of reality *may be externally related*. Everything you can think of, however vast or inclusive, has on the pluralistic view a genuinely "external" environment of some sort or amount.[157]

[155] This is a rather problematic claim of both James and Bergson, in that they both fail to understand variant representations of dynamic activity that are possible under complex conceptual notational systems.

[156] "Moderate" is particularly appropriate, in that James sides neither with mind (as does the "strong," idealistic version) nor matter (as does the "weak" epiphenomenalism).

[157] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 145.

As he puts it earlier, "Radical empiricism and pluralism stand out for the legitimacy of the notion of some."[158] Although James appears to be generous concerning the possibility of the absolute, as I have argued he is not at all certain that the absolute or the all-knower as they are normally conceived are even philosophically comprehensible. In light of that, pluralism may well be the only fall-back position in the text, granting that James has, through refining radical empiricism, solved his own problems with regard to collectivities.

Although the logical preference for pluralism is real, from the discussions in the preceding chapters it should be clear that James's commitment to pluralism is a great deal deeper. First, pluralism accords much more easily with the empiricist mood so central to his philosophy. Instead of defining the parts in light of the (unexperienced) whole, empiricism begins with the parts experienced, and proceeds toward whatever wholes seem factually indicated. Second, in never quite closing the circle on the contents of experience (and by extension, the world), James's pluralism is able to leave open theoretical space for real, factual novelty (which comes about all the same), such as that found in new scientific discoveries, new or unexpected experiences (for example, religious experiences), and even the inexhaustible wealth of detail in any given bit of pure experience. Third, pluralism with its "ever not quite" attitude provides a significant and even imperative place philosophically for our moral sensibilities, and our practical and moral rationality. By considering the world to be in process, making a place for novelty, and, in the case of pluralistic panpsychism, describing a means for our own actions to influence the flux, pluralism therefore makes comprehensible the moral aspect of our own activities in the universe:

> the incompleteness of the pluralistic universe, thus assumed and held to as the most probable hypothesis, is also represented by the pluralistic philosophy as being self-reparative through us, as getting its disconnections remedied in part by our behavior.[159]

This implies, then, that pluralism for James means a commitment to a contingent moral and practical teleology. Refusing any coercive conception of final causality, this teleology instead makes the *telos* "absolutely" contingent on what actually transpires during the playing

[158] Ibid., pp. 40–1. [159] Ibid., p. 148.

out of time and history. As I argued in chapter 3, James's pluralism is thus prospective in a piecemeal, contingent sense.[160]

Given this multi-faceted conception of the import of pluralism, it is evident that James's modification of his panpsychism by the epithet "pluralistic" is meant to indicate, above all, the import and value of all of our human activities within the world of pure experience. Pluralistic panpsychism allows James both to articulate coherently, and in philosophical detail, the *fact that* our activity makes a difference and to explicate with equally rigorous specificity the *means by* which our activities make those "real" differences. Intimacy in our actions, sentiments, and conceptions of the world of pure experience is thus made philosophically comprehensible, at least as a potentiality; the balance of rationality is therefore increased. It follows, then, that our hopes can also be seen to be at least somewhat more plausible.

SUPERHUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FINITE GOD

At the end of lecture 7, after providing what must be considered an explanation of his refined radical empiricism, James exits the field of logical and metaphysical contest and returns to the factual realm of experience, posing two questions: Is any superhuman consciousness probable? If so, is its form more likely monistic or pluralistic?[161] By raising the factual issue of probability vis-à-vis a superhuman consciousness here, he returns to the broader themes with which he began his lectures, asking after the probable truth (the degree of trueness) of an intimate and sympathetic rendition of the universe, one which finds human beings' hopes and sentiments of rationality warranted in the existence of real, superhuman collectivities of the better parts of our experiences.

Although this is clearly the gist of the questions, it might also seem at first glance that in the second of these two questions James is needlessly reraising the philosophical specter of the absolute by asking again about pluralism and monism. There is a plausible interpretation of the second question, however, that follows on the question of probability, given a form of radically empiricist, pluralistic panpsychism. On this reading, James's second question is a factual query of degree, a question of whether the (or a) superhuman consciousness is in fact more

[160] See the conclusions to chapter 3 for the related discussion.
[161] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 133.

monistic or more pluralistic. To put this another way, how much of the world of pure experience is taken up or included in such consciousness(es)? James's arguments up to this point in the text have ruled out the all-knower in its absolute form; however, he also points out that an "almost all-knower" is quite consistent with his refined philosophical system, concluding that "The absolute is not the impossible being I once thought it."[162] Several pages later, he clarifies what he means:

> the only way to escape from the paradoxes and perplexities that a consistently thought-out monistic universe suffers from . . . is to be frankly pluralistic and assume that the superhuman consciousness, however vast it may be, has itself an external environment, and consequently is finite.[163]

The issue of the second question, therefore, is not the issue of all or nothing; it follows that the absolute is not likely to return, at least not while the stream of experience continues.[164] Instead, the real remaining questions for James (and for sympathetic philosophies of intimacy) are the factual questions of both probability and degree: Does *our* world of pure experience admit of evidence of superhuman consciousness(es)? Does it (or do they) seem to be *more* monistic, or *more* pluralistic? In the concluding pages of *A Pluralistic Universe*, then, James turns back to actual records of human experiences in order to determine what the facts seem to bear out. For this factual evaluation James really has two major resources, both of which form a substantive part of his own experience as a natural scientist and philosopher: the suggestive but ever problematic records of paranormal phenomena from his longstanding efforts as a psychical researcher, and the factual record collated and evaluated for his Gifford Lectures, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

With regard to the record of psychical phenomena (which I have for the most part not treated in this study), James tenders his conclusions in a popular article for the *American Magazine* a little more than a year after his Hibbert Lectures. In what can only be hailed as a memorable application of the analogical method of which Fechner would have been proud, James writes:

> Out of my experience, such as it is (and it is limited enough) one fixed conclusion dogmatically emerges, and that is this, that we with our lives are

[162] Ibid., p. 132. [163] Ibid., p. 140.

[164] There is always the possibility that at the end of experience, everything could be contained, or brought together. James is, however, doubtful of this. See, e.g., *Pragmatism*, p. 142, *Varieties*, pp. 413–14.

like islands in the sea, or like trees in the forest. The maple and the pine may whisper to each other with their leaves, and Conanicut and Newport hear each other's fog-horns. But the trees also commingle their roots in the darkness underground, and the islands also hang together through the ocean's bottom. Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir. Our "normal" consciousness is circumscribed for adaptation to our external earthly environment, but the fence is weak in spots, and fitful influences from beyond leak in, showing the otherwise unverifiable common connexion. Not only psychical research, but metaphysical philosophy and speculative biology are led in their own ways to look with favor on some such "panpsychic" view of the universe as this.[165]

Although James's conclusions here could be read as being based on no facts whatsoever, his independent research activities as well as his presidency of the Society for Psychical Research belie such an interpretation. From his very early years of training as an MD up to his death, James engaged in detailed observation and expansive review of psychical phenomena, focusing in particular in his later years on mediumship.[166] Contrary to what his final conclusions might suggest, James was actually quite skeptical of jumping to conclusions about the veracity of purported psychical events.[167] He did, however, find himself forced to resolve that the most reasonable explanation for certain psychical phenomena was to postulate some sort of "leakage" between a wider, interpersonal area of consciousness (or experience) and the otherwise "fenced" individual field or sphere of experience.

Given the discussion of James's Gifford Lectures in chapter 3, and particularly in light of the radically empiricist reconstruction of certain passages of *Varieties* that I offered there, such conclusions should not seem unfamiliar. Toward the end of *A Pluralistic Universe*, James in fact returns explicitly to his descriptions and language from the conclusion of *Varieties*, this time leaving no doubt in the minds of the audience of the radically empiricist, panpsychist interpretation that he intends. In 1908, he writes:

[165] James, "Confidences of a 'Psychical Researcher,'" *Essays in Psychical Research*, p. 374. Compare the similar text of *A Pluralistic Universe*: "We may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing the books and hearing the conversation, but having no inkling of the meaning of it all," p. 140.

[166] See the helpful introduction to *Essays in Psychical Research* for an historical review of James's activities. See also his rather expansive "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control," in *Essays in Psychical Research*. James compiled the report in 1909, having begun work on it in 1906.

[167] See, for example, James, "Report on Mrs. Piper," *Essays in Psychical Research*, pp. 278–9.

Every bit of us at every moment is part and parcel of a wider self, it quivers along various radii like the wind-rose on a compass, and the actual in it is continuously one with possibles not yet in our present sight. And just as we are co-conscious with our own momentary margin, may we not ourselves form the margin of some more really central self in things which is co-conscious with the whole of us? May not you and I be confluent in a higher consciousness, and confluently active there, tho we now know it not?[168]

This wider self is, without a doubt, not merely the conscious self plus the subconscious self that one could infer from the conclusions of *Varieties*. Instead, this "wider self" is most definitely a panpsychic, superhuman consciousness, a collectivity of parts drawn from our finite experiences into a larger, more expansive whole.

If there were to remain any doubt in his listeners' minds of the continuity of the empirical and spiritual accounts in *Varieties* with the philosophical system articulated and referred to in *A Pluralistic Universe*, James makes himself crystal clear by quoting his own passages on the "more" and the "wider self" from the Gifford Lectures:

To quote words which I have used elsewhere, the believer finds that the tenderer parts of his personal life are continuous with a *more* of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him and which he can keep in working touch with, and in a fashion get on board of and save himself, when all of his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck. In a word, the believer is continuous, to his own consciousness, at any rate, with a wider self from which saving experiences flow in.[169]

Where the 1902 text was at best ambiguous as to both the "objectivity" of this claim about the "more" and the extent of the "wider self," in *A Pluralistic Universe* James recasts his Gifford Lecture conclusions, expanding their "objective" claim to the philosophical level, and enlarging the wider self to a potentially maximal, and definitely superhuman, extent.[170] In 1902 the evidence was not particularly ambiguous to James, but the philosophical account was certainly more problematic. This was due to two facts: on the one hand, James's radical empiricism had not been publicly explicated; on the other hand, he had not managed to provide to his own satisfaction a fully adequate metaphysical account of the

[168] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 131.
[169] Ibid., p. 139. Cf. *Varieties*, pp. 400, 405. James actually conflates two separate passages, bringing together the subjective and objective "truths" from *Varieties*.
[170] See the conclusions of chapter 3 for the ambiguity of the account in *Varieties*.

problem of co-consciousness.[171] In 1908, however, with the refined, pluralistically panpsychic radical empiricism in place, James is confident about presenting the religious facts in a strong light. His general conclusion in 1908, then, is not only that a superhuman co-consciousness is probable, but that the facts appear to require it.[172]

As to the character of this superhuman consciousness, in 1902 James had averred that the facts seem to be more consistent with a finite interpretation of the deity rather than an infinite one: "religious experience, as we have studied it, cannot be cited as unequivocally supporting the infinitist belief."[173] In the Hibbert Lectures James underlines this factual estimation, noting that most people actually consider God(s) to be "finite, either in power or knowledge, or in both at once."[174] Above and beyond this empirical evidence, however, he is also in a position to say, philosophically, that the most plausible account of any superhuman consciousness involves finitude in the forms of "having an environment, being in time, and working out a history."[175] With the all-knower qua absolute shown to be philosophically incoherent, the superhuman consciousness must be cast pluralistically in a manner analogous to the finite aggregates of consciousness of which we are more frequently aware in our experience. Although the superhuman consciousness may be highly expansive, it cannot be considered to be all-inclusive in the way the rationalist's all-knower is, not if we are to continue to make sense of our varied sentiments of rationality and our own, concrete experiences. "Let God but have the least infinitesimal *other* of any kind beside him," James writes, "and empiricism and rationalism might strike hands in a lasting treaty of peace."[176] It follows from this that his view is open to the possibility of a plurality of such superhuman consciousnesses, thereby entertaining the potential of a very robust rendition of religious pluralism.

In the postscript to *Varieties*, James had characterized his general philosophical position as being a version of "crasser" or "piecemeal" supernaturalism, in contrast to both reductive naturalism or materialism and the refined supernaturalism of philosophers of the absolute. Although his inclinations there were clear, he was forced in *Varieties* to rely on a relatively weak, pragmatic argument for the concrete,

[171] Whether James is aware of the explicit problems later raised by Miller and Bode in his radically empiricist account in 1902 is unclear; he is, however, quite troubled still by arguments *for* the absolute.

[172] See, e.g., James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 135, 139. [173] James, *Varieties*, p. 413.

[174] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 141. [175] Ibid., p. 144. [176] Ibid., p. 141.

psychological differences in fact predicted (or accounted for) by such an hypothesis because of his decision not to produce the philosophical course of lectures. At the same time, and with very little argument, James had also articulated this supernaturalism as a pluralism in which "the salvation of the world [is made] conditional upon the success with which each unit does its part."[177] As such, he (albeit relatively dogmatically) also embraced an open-ended, contingent teleological view in 1902.

From the vantage of the philosophical argument of *A Pluralistic Universe*, it is quite reasonable to say that in 1908 James has a much stronger and more persuasive argument at hand for piecemeal supernaturalism. Radical empiricism, taken as a pluralistic form of panpsychism, can be seen to heed *in toto* the goals of James's piecemeal supernaturalism of the *Varieties* postscript. Not only does it account for many "differences in fact" to be postulated by virtue of God's (or Gods') existence, but it also provides an account for how, indeed, the superhuman consciousness can be understood metaphysically to influence (and be influenced by) the individual – how religious experience happens. Where in *Varieties* James had to be content with speaking only of the psychological "hither side" of religious experience, at the conclusion of the Hibbert Lectures he can claim to have accounted both for how "saving experiences" can flow in from a superhuman consciousness and for how our activities can be seen to aid in remedying the universe's (and by extension, the superhuman consciousness's) disconnections at the most basic, metaphysical level.[178] All of this is made possible by the panpsychist and radically empiricist metaphysics (conjoined with the contextualization of logic) with which James explains the compounding of consciousness. Through conceiving the world after a social analogy, as both reciprocally interdependent and "strung-along, not rounded in and closed," James is therefore able to make space (in theory) for all of the empirical facts of experience, to balance our various and competing senses of rationality, and finally, to proffer a sympathetic philosophy that is, at least potentially, intimate at every level.[179]

James's argument in *A Pluralistic Universe*, then, proves to be both empirical and logical. Although it is crafted to be maximally persuasive, his goals remain true to his own view of conceptual logic and philosophy. Thus he admits in his conclusion that even his own *Weltanschauung* is not fundamentally coercive. "Not one step in this process is logical,"

[177] James, *Varieties*, p. 414. [178] See ibid., pp. 405, 414; *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148.
[179] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148.

he writes, noting that believing in such a pluralistic picture is a case of "life exceeding logic."[180] Holding to such a sympathetic and intimate view of the world as that of pluralistically panpsychic radical empiricism, however, *may* well result in making the world of pure experience itself more intimate at every level. "And your acting thus may in certain special cases be a means of making it securely true in the end," James observes. "Thus do philosophy and reality, theory and action," he concludes, "work in the same circle indefinitely."[181]

[180] Ibid., p. 148. [181] Ibid., p. 149.

CHAPTER 5

Estimations and anticipations

In December 1899 when James wrote to Frances Morse of the pair of "bully volumes" he intended for his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, he indicated that the second course was to be his own last will and testament, "setting forth the philosophy best adapted to normal religious needs."[1] When he died in August 1910, having just returned from a trip to Europe, it was not obvious that James had delivered the metaphysical text promised to his colleagues and friends for so many years. Although one might reasonably debate which of the achieved texts from the first decade of the 1900s is closest to fitting the bill, I hope that I have allayed doubts that by 1910 James had sought to fulfill at least the spirit, if not the letter, of his pledge to produce a metaphysical philosophy adapted to human religiousness as he understood it. Philosophically comprehending that "piecemeal supernaturalism" so tantalizingly beckoned to in the postscript to *Varieties* has in many respects been both the catalyst and the impetus for this book.

Up to this point I have pursued two different but interrelated methodological programs, one historical and the other systematic. By attending anew to the historical development of James's thought through the last two decades of his life, it has been possible to see with greater clarity not only what his various views were, but also what many of his concerns were in coming to hold them. In chapter 2, his interest in metaphysics as he understood it as well as the specific formulations he embraced in radical empiricism were seen to arise significantly out of his dissatisfaction with the philosophical implications of his own psychological formulations. As a result, from the systematic perspective both the continuities and the breaks with James's work in psychology were rendered more evident, as was the historical case for an earlier date

[1] James to Frances R. Morse, 24 December 1899, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 112.

(1895) for his development of the central doctrines of radical empiricism. One important implication of this earlier dating was exhibited in chapter 3, where taking an historical approach to James's previous work and his actual experiences in writing the Gifford Lectures created a context in which a reconstructive, philosophical reading of *Varieties* became not only possible but rather plausible. This philosophical reading itself set up the more deeply systematic and philosophically revealing reading of James's 1908 Hibbert Lectures that comprises chapter 4, a reading that underscores not only the continuation of radical empiricism, but also its modification into a religiously open pluralistic panpsychism – the view which, I have argued, is most compellingly seen as James's final and most philosophically encompassing and coherent view.

James has frequently been called America's foremost philosopher. At the same time he has habitually been characterized as a literary philosopher, and by implication as imprecise, unsystematic, and even perhaps somewhat superficial.[2] Although James's formulations are indeed of literary merit, they also exhibit remarkable depth, order, and (although with more variation) philosophical precision. As I argued in chapters 1 and 4, James's pluralistically panpsychic, radically empiricist view of the universe – with its methodological, metaphysical, factual, and epistemological components – can be understood as a systematic and comprehensive philosophical view despite the fact that it is not explicated *in toto* in a single work. Moreover, the "final" form of this view evidenced in *A Pluralistic Universe*, with its fully reciprocal, social interpretation of the dynamism of the universe, can also be taken to render comprehensible in detail what James might have had in mind for the unwritten philosophical course of *Varieties*. In April 1900 James had commented in another letter to his friend Frances Morse that he had set for himself a hard problem:

> *first*, to defend (against all the prejudices of my "class") "experience" against "philosophy" as being the real backbone of the world's religious life – I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning; and *second*, to make the hearer or reader believe, what I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is

[2] See, e.g., Myers, *William James: His Life and Thought*, p. xiii, and Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 232, for concurring opinions about the public perception of James.

mankind's most important function. A task well-nigh impossible, I fear, and in which I shall fail; but to attempt it is *my* religious act.[3]

Interpreting the systematic detail and coherence of James's empirical yet intimate spiritualistic vision has been a central aim of this enterprise; dwelling sympathetically yet critically within its "turbid, muddled, gothic" details for a time has been another.

For this book to have more than historical, interpretive interest, however, it is necessary to move beyond the principally reconstructive stance I have assumed up to this point into a more explicitly critical, potentially appropriative posture. In this last chapter, then, I turn from the important reconstructions of the past toward the pressing critical concerns of the present: namely, estimating the import of this interpretation of James and the contours of his thought for current critical projects in philosophy and religion. While there are many relevant questions, since space is limited I shall address two principal issues in this chapter: (1) the place and meaning of truth in James's thought with reference to current debates about pragmatism; and (2) the value of his conception of experience. The first of these is, in a certain sense, a question that this study has conspicuously deferred throughout, in that I have discussed pragmatism as an understanding of truth only with respect to radical empiricism. The question of truth requires further attention not simply with respect to understanding James, who did after all publish a book explicitly on the subject (or two, depending on how one considers *Pragmatism*), but more directly because present discussions and appropriations of the American philosophical tradition are so thoroughly consumed by the subject. While pragmatism has so far received limited treatment, the second issue – James's conception of experience – has been highlighted throughout this discussion. What remains for this endeavor is to estimate its value and anticipate directions in which it might take us in critical thought about religion and philosophy.

JAMES AND TRUTH

The significant revival of interest in James's philosophy in the last quarter of the twentieth century, while varied in its perspectives and breadth of appreciation, has frequently centered on pragmatism and

[3] James to Morse, 12–13 April 1900, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 127.

its "theory of truth" as the most significant element of his thought.[4] James is, after all, considered the inaugurator (if not necessarily the inventor) of the *pragmatic tradition* in American thought, despite his own admissions that the word "pragmatism" may have been a mistake.[5] While the focus on pragmatism is supported by some of James's own statements about the importance of pragmatism (or *Pragmatism* the book) to his work, the enduring focus on it and its theory of truth in particular has had as much to do with the development and interests of philosophy in the twentieth century as it has with James's thought itself.[6] Ironically, one could plausibly argue that it is predominantly the un-Jamesian interests and commitments of Anglo-American philosophy in the twentieth century (signified easily though not exhaustively by logical positivism, the linguistic turn, and analytic philosophy) that have most forcefully led James's interpreters to focus on his understanding of truth as the key to his system.[7]

[4] James uses the language of a "theory of truth" ambiguously in *Pragmatism*, particularly given his parallel reconsideration of what "theory" implies. For example, he first brings up the issue of pragmatism as a theory of truth in his second lecture, just after having stated that "*theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas, in which we can rest*" (p. 32). His chapter on the subject is entitled "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," leaving the word "theory" aside altogether.

[5] James admits the unfortunate character of the word "pragmatism" in print in "The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstanders" in *Meaning of Truth*, p. 101, an article first published in January 1908, and in *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 111. He discusses this in letters as well. See, *inter alia*, James to Dickinson Miller, 5 August 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 295, and James to C. A. Strong, 21 August 1907, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 544.

[6] James's comments to this effect are often ambiguous as to whether pragmatism as a theory (and theory of truth) is itself of central importance, or whether it is instrumental for his broader philosophical program as a whole. See, for example, his comments in the preface to *Meaning of Truth*, where he claims only that the theory of truth is pivotal to the book *Pragmatism*, while also stating that "the establishment of the pragmatist theory of truth is a step of first-rate importance in making radical empiricism prevail" (pp. 3, 6), thus taking back what he said in the preface to *Pragmatism* (p. 6). Seconding the ambiguity, however, elsewhere James remarks to his son William that the book *Pragmatism* is the most important thing he had yet written (James to William James, 24 April 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 276), and comments to Schiller that "the theory of truth is the key to all the rest of our positions" (James to Schiller, 19 April 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 271).

[7] This issue is complex, since by no means have all or even most interpreters of James been from (or content with) the mainstream of analytic philosophy (John Wild was an earlier "outsider," while presently Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam both write from perspectives fully informed by but now critical in significant respects of analytic philosophy). Without delving into a history of scholarship on James – an interesting project itself – it is fair to say that philosophical readings of James have been heavily influenced by a kind of philosophy he would at times find rather foreign. For concurring opinions on effects of the intervention (and difference) of logical positivism and the linguistic turn (albeit with different estimations of pragmatism), see Cornel West, *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 123, and Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. ix and passim.

Although I have been interested principally in James's philosophical *Weltanschauung* in this study, but for the brief discussion in chapter 1, I have foregone focusing on truth. The reasons for this are twofold and related, one being substantive, the other strategic. First, I have become persuaded that the pragmatic "theory" of truth in James actually does relatively little work from the standpoint of his philosophical system, provided that one grants that his *Weltanschauung* is primarily defined by the tenets of a revised, pluralistically panpsychist radical empiricism. By this I mean that the gist of his pragmatic epistemology is actually already included in and dependent on his radical empiricism and its twofold account of knowing as a relational function within experience. What pragmatism adds with respect to truth is neither a full "Epistemology" in the modern sense of a theory founding a whole philosophy nor a portable epistemology uncommitted to a particular metaphysics as James rhetorically argued. Rather, the position of pragmatism is a series of related conceptions or explanations that are contingent on but otherwise not fully specified in James's radically empiricist position.

Second, and following from this, I am also persuaded that if one begins to understand James by considering pragmatism and its understanding of truth without first having considered the complexities of radical empiricism as a metaphysical and epistemological system, then James seems to be more confused and confusing than if one proceeds in the contrary manner.[8] In short, then, I disagree *for our present* with his then-contemporary judgment, voiced in the 1909 preface to *The Meaning of Truth*, that the acceptance of pragmatism would be a crucial but instrumental step toward the ultimate success of radical empiricism. For us (if not also for James) theories of truth are too commonplace, too contentious, and ultimately too unproductive to be good points of departure.[9] That said, the issues raised by a consideration of James and "truth," both past and present, are nonetheless important and fruitful for understanding James. Thus to several of those issues I now turn.[10]

[8] This is, in fact, what happens for many readers of the book *Pragmatism* who are otherwise unfamiliar with James, since in that text James overtly eschews stating any of his points in terms of radical empiricism, on the rhetorical gambit that he can make headway through discussing a general theory of meaning and truth.

[9] Compare this to Hilary Putnam's judgment about the dead end of analytical philosophy's own project. See "After Empiricism," in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, John Rachman and Cornel West (eds.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 28.

[10] One pertinent irony is that "truth" has in fact proved to be the way back into the American philosophical tradition known as pragmatism for many. My argument is that it is nonetheless not the best way into James's thought.

In September 1907 James remarked to his brother Henry that he had been highly misunderstood in his book *Pragmatism*, noting that everyone represented his philosophy there as one

> got up for the use of engineers, electricians and doctors, whereas it really grew up from a more subtle and delicate theoretic analysis of the function of knowing, than previous philosophers had been willing to make.[11]

Many (though by no means all) of James's readers in the decades hence have noticed that his analysis is complex, if not necessarily "subtle and delicate."[12] Unfortunately, the recognition of this fact has by no means created a clear consensus on what James in fact did understand through his "pragmatic" account. One of the reasons for this difficulty has to do with his frequent use of the appellation "pragmatism" for his whole philosophical view during the years 1906–9. Where interpreters such as T. L. S. Sprigge and Hilary Putnam consider all forms of knowing articulated by James under the rubric of *pragmatism*, in chapter 1 I sought to offer a different way of organizing and understanding James – particularly on the broad issue of knowing – following his lead in *A Pluralistic Universe* and *The Meaning of Truth*, where he states clearly that "radical empiricism" is his principal and most encompassing philosophical position.[13]

My chief tactic in chapter 1 was to separate James's analyses of direct acquaintance and knowledge about from his pragmatic conception of truth. In doing this, I wanted to emphasize the systematic metaphysical underpinnings of James's epistemology, and thus render more clearly the ways in which his "direct realism" of pure experiencing and his accounts of the various kinds of conceptual knowing work together in a radically empiricist, pluralistic world of pure experience. This perspective also allowed me to take a more restrictive view of pragmatism, limiting it to a dynamic conception of "truth" in cases where the twofold functional account of knowing was itself not sufficient. I have thus considered truth only in relation to the (nonetheless varied) conceptual field of ideas or propositions stressed by James himself, as opposed to

11 James to Henry James, 8 September 1907, *Correspondence of William James*, vol. III, p. 344.

12 Sprigge's analysis of the multiple strands or interests involved in James's pragmatism is quite helpful, as is Putnam's thematic consideration. See Sprigge, "James, Aboutness, and his British Critics," and Hilary Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," both in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*; see also Sprigge, *James and Bradley*, pp. 11ff.

13 James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 26, and *Meaning of Truth*, p. 6. Interestingly, in *Pluralistic Universe* James only mentions "pragmatism" as a doctrine once, expressing reservations (p. 111). He uses the adjective "pragmatic" twice and "pragmatically" once, each time invoking pragmatism's looking to practical effects for meaning (pp. 19, 96, 145).

the realm of reality, however conceptualized that sphere always is.[14] Further, I have sought to link the pragmatic account of truth directly with James's metaphysics of radical empiricism and its functional view of the processes of knowing, seeing its principal components of indirect verification, satisfaction, and sociality as intimately bound up in the phenomenological and metaphysical components and dynamics of James's world-view.

My treatment in chapter 1 was, I think, sufficient as an overview of James's position on truth, particularly in light of the other interests of this book. However restricted, the issue of truth nonetheless holds further questions both for this interpretation of James and for the prospects for a Jamesian position. Here I shall take up two broad themes critical to current interpretive and constructive debates in philosophy: (1) the question of realism or antirealism and (2) the issue of relative and absolute truth.

Realism or antirealism?

One of the immediate responses by James's philosophical contemporaries to his Lowell Lectures, both in journal form and as *Pragmatism*, was to see James advocating a form of subjectivism on which what is true is merely what it is psychologically useful to believe, regardless of any external or independent facts or realities. This reading was broadly distributed, offered both by his closest allies (including R. B. Perry and C. A. Strong) and his more obvious opponents (G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, among others).[15] James's response was unequivocal, both in correspondence and in print. "I am a natural realist," he wrote to Dickinson Miller in 1907.[16] Two weeks later he fulminated to Charles Strong that "It seems as if the whole world had conspired to insist that I *shall* not be a realist, in spite of anything I . . . say to the contrary."[17]

[14] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 106.

[15] Although Perry's response is indirect, James took it to include him. See Perry, "Review of Pragmatism as a Philosophical Generalization," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method*, 4 (1907). For James's reading of Perry, see James to Miller, 5 August 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 295. Strong's response is in a series of letters to James from June 1907 to January 1908, bMS Am 1092.1 (t.c.), the bulk of which is included in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, pp. 536–52. Moore's critique is in "Professor James's Pragmatism," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 8 (1907–8), 33–77. Russell's major response may be found in "Transatlantic 'Truth,'" *Albany Review*, 2 (1908), 393–410, reprinted as "William James's Conception of Truth" in *Philosophical Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1910).

[16] James to Dickinson Miller, 5 August 1907, *Letters of William James*, vol. II, p. 295.

[17] James to C. A. Strong, 21 August 1907, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 543.

James was no more subtle in print: "Throughout my whole discussion, I remain an epistemological realist," he declared in 1908 in the *Philosophical Review*.[18]

While James was unambiguous in his declarations, the question of his commitment to an "independent" reality participating in the determination of truth has endured to the present; currently, it animates the debate in the neo-pragmatic movement. The most prominent contemporary antirealist interpreter of James is Richard Rorty, who has seen James (and pragmatism in general) as abandoning anything akin to epistemological realism, despite James's pronouncements to the contrary. "Our responsibility to truth is not, for James, a responsibility to get things right," Rorty writes, noting later that for James, "a belief's purported 'fit' with the intrinsic nature of reality adds nothing which makes any practical difference to the fact that it is universally agreed to lead to successful action."[19] When this is taken in conjunction with Rorty's more general statements, including the claim that for pragmatists "there are no constraints on conversation save conversational ones – no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow inquirers," a radically antirealist – although by no means subjectivist – James appears.[20]

Rorty's interpretation of James no doubt performs what he, following Harold Bloom, would call a "strong" reading, one which does not so much seek to be true to the author interpreted, but rather advances the interests of the interpreter.[21] There is, however, an important distinction to be drawn between a plausible interpretation of an author and a constructive proposal; it is here that Rorty fails, albeit with some intent, to draw reasonable lines.

Although similar in denying realism, Rorty's characterization is not identical to that of James's early critics. Where they saw James as devolving into subjectivism via his notions of satisfaction and expediency,

[18] James, "The Pragmatist Account of Truth and its Misunderstanders," *Philosophical Review* (January 1908), included as chapter 8 of *Meaning of Truth*, p. 106.

[19] Richard Rorty, "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility, and Romance," in *The Cambridge Companion to William James*, pp. 85, 86–7.

[20] Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 165. One might read "wholesale" as offering a way out for Rorty here, although he appears not to make much of it. James would, in any case, insist on "retail" constraints from the concreteness of experience itself, whether put into language or not.

[21] See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 24. Interestingly, a "strong" reading for Rorty is motivated by anxiety over being merely derivative. Rorty, however, is in no such danger with respect to James.

and thus either losing the shared external world or, more extremely, devolving into solipsism, Rorty has James rejecting even any sort of phenomenalism, instead taking the linguistic turn. Rorty correctly reads James's commitment to a shared world, and rightly sees him denying subjectivism in favor of what we might call "intersubjectivism" with respect to knowledge about and truth. Rorty goes one step further, however, and reads James as understanding that shared world as *exclusively* constituted through language, thereby denying what James saw as his own epistemological realism, not to mention his commitment to pluralistic panpsychism and the novelty produced through the radical plurality of concrete pure experience. Like James's contemporaries, Rorty thus performs a reduction of James's notions of expediency and satisfaction, but this time to mere intersubjective agreement concerning action.

That Rorty reads James in this manner is not particularly controversial. Given the investigations of this book, however, it should be clear that Rorty is (perhaps intentionally) overlooking James's recognition of the particular contributions of the independent, concrete world of ejects and bits of pure experience to our processes of experiencing, thinking, and truth claiming. Rorty does not deny an external, causal order that affects human thinking and acting in its independence. What he does repudiate, however, is the claim that this order (or even elements within it) is in any meaningful way dynamically or reciprocally linked to what we say about it. Thus Rorty concludes that changes in our judgments of truth have *exclusively* to do with cultural changes in language use, rather than with the complex processes of verification James proposes that crucially include both inputs from the non-human components of the world (ejective realities) and variables from individual and cultural factors.[22] Rorty, then, considers only one half of James's world-view, a fact clearly underscored by his exclusive focus on pragmatism and his refusal to take radical empiricism seriously.

The import of this question with respect to understanding James's world-view cannot be overestimated. As I have presented James, one

[22] See ibid., pp. 3–7, for a cogent statement of this (though with no mention of James). Rorty does have one way out of all of this through his use of modifiers such as "intrinsic" with respect to nature, the world, language, or the mind. On such a view Rorty could be read as saying only that systematic investigations of these lead nowhere, while piecemeal investigations of certain objects might be fruitful. That would be plausible, and more compatible with James, but Rorty is rarely true to it. In these discussions Rorty tends to be so skeptical of theory that he is unable to recognize the value of minimal (or what Cornel West has called "heuristic") theoretical or metaphysical reflections of a positive sort. The latter are what James understood by his own empiricist (and thus fallible) metaphysical reflections.

of the guiding notions of his philosophical view precisely involves articulating how: (1) we can understand our thoughts and reflections on our experience to refer to independent realities and be colored meaningfully by them; while at the same time recognizing (2) the constitutive effects or contributions of our own positions and compositions as knowers and experiencers of those same realities. In refusing to admit the former claim, which is essential to James's dynamic system of pure experience, Rorty effectively ignores James's whole philosophical enterprise from 1895 until his death, recognizing only that isolated aspect that coincides with his own philosophical position.

Related to his denial of the influence of a world beyond our language, there is a second problem with Rorty's reading of James related to realism, one which also resonates with a criticism James directly addressed: namely, the supposed sufficiency of action for truth (and knowing). As discussed earlier, James had reservations about his choice of the word "pragmatism," given the inferences it provoked from his readers.[23] Responding to critics who seized upon the short-term, crass, "cash-value" character of the view as its exclusive insight, James declared that action, or "corollaries of a practical sort," are *secondary* to the "refined theoretic question that pragmatism begins with."[24] To James's eye, his critics had missed pragmatism's appreciation of the significant character of enduring ideas as objects of thought (not merely thoughts themselves) – what in chapter 4 I called James's recognition of the possible theoretical value of thought, and in chapter 1 I called our contributions to the world through our knowing.[25] James writes:

> when Dr. Schiller speaks of ideas "working" well, the only thing they think of is their immediate workings in the physical environment, their enabling us to make money, or gain some similar "practical" advantage. Ideas do work thus, of course, immediately and remotely; but they work indefinitely inside the mental world also.[26]

Later in the same passage, after characterizing pragmatism as throwing wide open the window on action as well as originality in thought, James notes that "few things could be sillier than to ignore the prior epistemological edifice in which the window is built, or to talk as if

[23] "The name 'pragmatism,' with its suggestion of action, has been an unfortunate choice, I have to admit, and has played into the hands of this mistake," James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 101.

[24] Ibid., p. 101.

[25] See also the "Seventh misunderstanding" on the theoretic interest later in the same essay, ibid., pp. 111–14.

[26] Ibid., p. 101.

pragmatism began and ended at the window."[27] Thus once again he invokes the connection between radical empiricism and pragmatism, implying that the latter is based on the former, ruling the exclusive focus on action out of court.

In these passages James takes for granted realism in pragmatism's epistemology and metaphysics, appealing both to the variability and the influence of a non-linguistic, independent environment as a (nonetheless non-foundational) given, albeit one we only recognize as such through experience. His argument, then, is with those who see him denying any power or novelty for *thought*, who thus place him in the company of the most thoroughgoing materialistic determinists despite all of his prior rejections of such determinism. Rorty's reading of James is interestingly parallel to this misreading, only inverted as if seen in a mirror. That is, where James sees his own critics reading him as taking action to be primary and sufficient with exclusive reference to an external, principally material reality, Rorty reads him as taking action to be primary and sufficient with reference to an exclusively linguistic, albeit intersubjective, reality. Both readings ignore the thorough *pluralism* of James's radical empiricism, whose ambidextrous notion of pure experience refuses to grant primacy to either thought or thing – language or non-linguistic reality – and whose dynamic, twofold account of knowing forwards this pluralism into epistemology. Rorty thus sees James throwing open a window on a different panorama from James's earlier critics; but like those very critics Rorty too fails to notice the critical edifice in which the window is built, one committed to a pluralistic metaphysics and a realist epistemology that go well beyond asserting the sufficiency of language for understanding the world. James is not averse to the linguistic turn, for he recognizes it in asserting that truth and knowing are always and in every case relative to the knower and his or her context.[28] He is, however, unwilling to read language as constitutively sufficient for a philosophical view of the world, much less an understanding of philosophy.

So far what I have offered is a rebuttal with respect to interpreting James rather than direct argument concerning the inadequacy of Rorty's view of the exclusive sufficiency of language for philosophy. The latter task, already broadly undertaken in the literature, is nonetheless significant, requiring more argument than is possible in this space. While I do not intend to offer a direct counterargument to antirealism or

[27] Ibid., p. 102. [28] In addition to the discussions of chapter 1, see ibid., pp. 146–7.

irrealism here, I have discussed Rorty at some length to highlight a particular kind of view to which James has frequently become coopted, and to argue against the simple plausibility of that alliance. Rorty is not the only such interpreter within the renascence of pragmatism. He shares company on this issue with such perceptive and engaging readers as Richard Poirier and Frank Lentricchia, who read James in connection with an American tradition of literary and cultural criticism that traces roots (at least in part) to Emerson – replete with his rich and complex metaphysics of language.[29] While James's view of language and the role of language in experience is no doubt influenced by the Emersonian tradition, and thus legitimately resonates with the literary-critical enterprise, this interpretive stance generally downplays James's unyielding alliance with empiricism and his understanding of concrete, immediate yet independent experience – what he calls the "thickness of reality." These distinctive features of his view are foregrounded in his metaphysics of radical empiricism and pluralistic panpsychism, and are uneasily comprehended by what turn out to be exclusively linguistic readings of James.[30]

My interpretation of James on this point, therefore, is closer to that of James Kloppenberg and Cornel West. Kloppenberg sees James and selected contemporaries (including Dewey) to be striking a new path in philosophy between forms of idealism and empiricism, seeking a *via media* in epistemology, ethics, and politics following on the failure of Kant's proposed reconciliation of rationalism and empiricism and its effects on these fields.[31] James is thus to be taken neither as an "old-style" epistemological realist nor as a new-style "discursive" critic, although his thought resonates to a significant degree with each.[32] With

[29] See, e.g., Richard Poirier, *Poetry and Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), and Frank Lentricchia, *Ariel and the Police: Michel Foucault, William James, Wallace Stevens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988). Henry S. Levinson is at times in this camp, particularly in his more recent reading of James in *Santayana, Pragmatism, and the Spiritual Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

[30] Levinson and Rorty are both partial exceptions here, since they embrace forms of naturalism and thus attend more to James's empiricism. However, both read James via a view of language unresponsive to his radical empiricism (in particular his view of direct acquaintance in connection with pure experience), much less his pluralistic panpsychism. Not surprisingly, both see radical empiricism as a somewhat unimportant, if not also embarrassing, mistake.

[31] See James Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), particularly the introduction and part I, and West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, pp. 66–7, and *Keeping Faith*, pp. 90–1.

[32] "Old-style" is not meant to indicate that this position has receded from view now. Rather, I mean simply to align it with the materialist view with which it is most frequently identified, both in James's era and our own. "Metaphysical realism" or "scientific realism" would be other ways to put the point.

the realists James shares a meaningful (although by no means identical) notion of realities with which one's ideas "agree" (what Cornel West calls a minimalist realism), independent in certain critical respects from our thoughts about them.[33] With the discursive critics James shares commitments to fallibilism, historicism, and intersubjectivity, as well as a recognition of the critical and indelible effects of our cognizing on what we cognize. James's mediating innovation, however, which both West and Kloppenberg see, is to recast and deemphasize realism and truth, rather than reject them, focusing instead on lived experience, processes of knowledge, and human sociality and context. This does not amount to antirealism, but rather constitutes a functional realism of a different cast.[34]

Absolute truth

One of the distinctive characteristics of many realists' (and idealists') positions in contrast to antirealists' is some sort of commitment to a conception of "Truth" with a capital T – "truth absolute" or "absolute truth," as James sometimes called it, truth as distinguished from justified or warranted belief, and above all, truth as distinguished from mere opinion. One reason James was read in his own time as a subjectivist and relativist (in the pejorative sense) rather than a realist had to do with his failure in the pragmatism melee to make himself clear on a conception assimilable to either realist or idealist understandings of absolute truth. James's colleague Josiah Royce raised this issue in 1908 in his handwritten response to James's 1907 "The Meaning of the Word 'Truth.'"[35] In that rejoinder, Royce questioned the viability of James's realism by attacking the sufficiency of James's account of the workings of true ideas, raising in particular the difficult question of the truth about past facts.[36] Never a realist himself, Royce incorporates in his own account a conception of workings similar to James's, all the while relying on an idealistic conception of an absolute knower to render

[33] The crucial point, of course, is to spell out what we mean by agreeing, as James argues in *The Meaning of Truth*. See pp. 117–19. For West's "minimalist realism" see *Keeping Faith*, p. 91.

[34] Charlene Haddock Seigfried recognizes this issue, but opts to concede the language of realism in favor of a hermeneutical or discursive classification. Strategically, I think this concedes too much, as how to understand realism is precisely one of the pressing philosophical problems unsolved by the current debates to which Seigfried defers. Further, the interpretive shift she proposes leads too far from James's views. See Seigfried, *William James's Radical Reconstruction of Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 360.

[35] James's article is included in 1909 in *The Meaning of Truth*.

[36] Perry reprints these comments. See *Thought and Character*, vol. II, pp. 735–6.

truth absolute. Royce implied that, minus the absolute, James could never meet the requirements of "Truth," and would be left instead only with the opinion of the day.

While not many since Royce have sought to win James over from realism to idealism, the question of "Truth" has continued to vex interpreters of James to the present.[37] If James is indeed some novel form of epistemological realist, then how does he understand truth as distinct from what we merely happen to believe? Moreover, how does this position relate to his overt commitments to fallibilism, historicism, and the interested character of knowledge articulated throughout his radical empiricism and his discussions of pragmatism – all commitments that would appear to place him closer to antirealism in contemporary parlance?

In a recent discussion of James on truth, Hilary Putnam provides an interesting analysis of the issue, defending James's realism by maintaining that James is committed to a notion of absolute truth constituted as an ideal, substantively similar to that of C. S. Peirce.[38] Putnam offers a textual argument from *Pragmatism* and *The Meaning of Truth*, noting that in *Pragmatism*, immediately after the now infamous claim that " 'The true,' to put it very briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking," James himself introduces absolute truth.[39] The point is further clarified in *The Meaning of Truth*, Putnam argues, where James directly contradicts his interpreters who claim that pragmatists cannot speak of absolute truth.[40] Ultimately, Putnam sees James distinguishing between "absolutely true" and "half-true," reading him as meaning the former when he uses the word "truth" or "true" alone (and thus in most usages), and only intending the latter when he explicitly limits truth to "half,"as in "half-truths."[41]

The critical part of Putnam's interpretation is his final claim about how to understand James's unmodified use of the words "truth" or "true." What is at stake is the degree to which James is satisfied with truth as verification and the extent to which he understands truth to differ, at least potentially, from verification. On Putnam's reading, what is merely verified is always only "half-true" for James, while what is

[37] Sprigge makes James more of an idealist than anyone recently; his treatment of James on pragmatism and truth is nonetheless balanced, sensitive to a variety of commitments, and instructive.

[38] See Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," particularly, pp. 179–83.

[39] See James, *Pragmatism*, pp. 106–7.

[40] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, pp. 142–5.

[41] Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," p. 181.

"true," by contrast, is true absolutely, standing in relation to an ideal or absolute truth to which we imagine all of our formulations will converge.

On the interpretation of James I have offered, Putnam is no doubt correct in noting that verification alone is not sufficient for the most demanding use of "truth" on James's part. The experience of termination (verification taken phenomenologically) is a strong indication of a statement's truth, or more aptly, perhaps, its claim to being knowledge about. However, many ideas once or twice verified nonetheless do not stand other tests of knowledge about within experience that yield truth, particularly those concerning the social aspects of satisfaction and integration with our stock of truths over time. Putnam is thus correct in seeing actual verification alone as amounting only to "half-truth," or something being "true in so far forth," as James elsewhere says. But what of his broader and more crucial interpretation that when James uses truth without a qualifier he means truth absolute?

In *The Meaning of Truth* James writes of "truth absolute" primarily in response to Heinrich Rickert and James's Harvard colleague Hugo Münsterberg, both of whom accused James of relativism.[42] James begins his rejoinder by embracing the accusation; nonetheless, he rejects the substance of the critique that as a relativist he cannot formulate an abstract conception of truth absolute in the pragmatic sense of an ideal opinion in which all might agree, and which no one would ever wish to change.[43] In responding, James asserts that he believes in his pragmatic account as firmly as does any other thinker, underlining the psychological force of predicating "truth" as a putative feature of an idea or thought. More importantly, he intimates that through embracing fallibilism in his own perspectival account of knowledge (what James actually means by "relativism"), as a pragmatist he is precisely employing a conception of truth absolute. "No relativist who ever actually walked the earth," James writes, "has denied the regulative character in his own thinking of the notion of absolute truth. What is challenged by relativists is the pretense on anyone's part to have found for certain at any given moment what the shape of that truth is."[44] James concludes by noting that "the proposition 'There *is* absolute truth' is the only absolute truth of which we can be sure."

[42] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 142. Interestingly, Putnam himself is frequently concerned with the problem of relativism. For his classic discussion, see Putnam, *Meaning, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[43] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 142. [44] Ibid., p. 143.

The discussion is interesting. In contrast to many of his other considerations of the "truth" of individual, concrete propositions, here James is primarily concerned with "truth" in the singular, "Truth" as a collective yet unified opinion, something that hangs together as a totality of thought about the world and presumably abides by James's chief philosophical virtue of consistency – that is, non-contradiction with respect to other knowledge.[45] Thus "absolute truth" in this usage is a singular, albeit complex, opinion, much like Peirce's fated, agreed-on opinion in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," which Peirce goes on to associate directly with "the real" and "reality."[46]

While not altogether uncommon in James's writings after 1895, this use of "truth" in the singular as referring to a *collective* opinion is not directly consonant with his more frequent focus on "truths" in the plural – the trueness or truthfulness of particular ideas or claims with respect both to concrete experience and the stock of (prior) truths. For example, in *Pragmatism* when James uses "truth" in the singular in "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth," he makes a point of glossing himself, noting that "Our account of truth is an account of truths in the plural . . . Truth for us is simply the collective name for verification-processes . . ."[47] Where "truth" in *Pragmatism* is really only a shorthand for truths in the making, "truth absolute" in this passage in *The Meaning of Truth* appears, by contrast, to involve the very idea of our stock of truths itself having come to completion, or at least some sort of permanent stasis.[48]

Whether James has a distinctive conception of truth absolute is not at issue. He is perfectly clear that he does, indicating moreover that his conception is drawn by applying the pragmatic principle to the concept of "truth absolute" itself.[49] The pragmatic difference made through distinguishing "truth absolute" from a relative conception of truth-as-verification is delivered through the notion of correction implicit in

[45] In response to Russell's critique, James writes that for an opinion to be true, two conditions must obtain: an object must be found, and the opinion must not be contradicted by anything else of which I am aware. See ibid., p. 148.

[46] See C. S. Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (eds.), 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. v, p. 407.

[47] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 104. See also *Meaning of Truth*, p. 109: "truth in the singular is only a collective name for truths in the plural, these consisting always of a series of definite events."

[48] Compare this to James's comment in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" that "there can be no final truth in ethics any more than in physics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say," *Will to Believe*, p. 141.

[49] See James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 142.

the idea of convergence. That is, the difference in practice resulting from having a conception of absolute truth is the difference between: (1) being content with mere verified opinion today (personal, merely subjective, and/or limited by historical perspective); and (2) feeling compelled to expand the realm of verification of an idea to wider and more inclusive perspectives of experience and deeper accounts of knowledge about, both synchronically and diachronically. The pragmatic meaning of absolute truth, then, appears to find its distinction for James in the habit or mandate of searching for more truth, a habit that critically does (and should) animate and pervade our actual practices of knowing in the present. Simple, discrete instances of knowledge about (or simple verifications) are thus not the only things we seek; in addition, we have a "metaphysical" drive more broadly to test that knowledge and organize it into systems of knowing.[50] The result of this drive, if projected to completion, ideally *might* culminate in a "singular" yet highly complex "truth."[51] The putative collective object of this possibility (and it is only ever a *putative* object) is what James means by truth absolute.

A crucial question remains from Putnam's analysis, since Putnam rejects this pragmatic interpretation of absolute truth. Does James's notion of absolute truth do any epistemological work beyond articulating this (nonetheless crucial) habitual animation of inquiry?[52] And if so, work of what sort? To put the question another way, does James's notion of truth as a "regulative ideal" function metaphysically or epistemologically to regulate, or partially yet objectively determine, the truth of particular opinions or statements?[53] Does "truth absolute" function for James to explain the conditions of the possibility of absolute truths being made (outside of its representation of our psychological drive for truth) beyond what we already know of the functional account of knowledge about?

[50] See chapter 2 for James's use of the term "metaphysical" in the psychological writings.

[51] I use "might" in place of "would" here in deference to James's pluralism with respect to temperament and philosophy. See chapter 4 for the discussion of this issue in *A Pluralistic Universe* and *Pragmatism*.

[52] Actually, Putnam treats this objection as claiming that James has a pragmatic understanding of "absolute truth," and a different theory of truth. I am suggesting the former, but denying the latter, at least insofar as he means a view independent from James's standard view of knowing. The view I am endorsing shifts the emphasis from truth to knowing, and thus correlates more closely with Cornel West's reading of James on this point. See Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," p. 181, and West, *American Evasion of Philosophy*, p. 67.

[53] For the "regulative ideal" references, see James, *Pragmatism*, p. 107; *Meaning of Truth*, pp. 142–3.

Based on my interpretation of James in this text, the general answer with respect to absolute truth must be no. For James truth, or perhaps more aptly "trueness" or "truthfulness," applies to particular ideas or statements advanced and tested in concrete, finite processes of knowing. Many of these truths become stable and unquestioned parts of our knowledge, and thus components of our habits of action. But none do so *by virtue* of their connection to something we might refer to as absolute truth. Truth for James is fundamentally piecemeal and plural, always relative to its situated "trowers" and subject to revision, regardless of how direct or repeated their verifications may be, or how reliable their ideas may prove with respect to other truths and other knowers.[54] Absolutely, " 'there *is* absolute truth' is the only absolute truth of which we can be sure," James writes, reminding readers of his claim in *Pragmatism* that "we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood."[55] Truth absolute, then, is a necessary conceptual commitment, expressive of our phenomenological awareness of our philosophical desire for systematic and thorough knowledge, and thus instructive of habit. But truth absolute provides no guarantees, and itself is not guaranteed. "No pragmatist needs to *dogmatize* about the consensus of opinion in the future being right," James writes; "he need only *postulate* that it will probably contain more of truth than anyone's opinion now."[56] In so postulating, James commits himself in action toward trowing truth, as opposed to being content with mere verification. He does not, however, commit himself to a substantive truth absolute in any more profound philosophical sense, either in a specific or more general case.[57]

By claiming that absolute truth has no deep metaphysical or epistemological status for James beyond reference to a nonetheless crucial

[54] For the reference to "trowers," see James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 147.

[55] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 143; *Pragmatism*, p. 107. [56] James, *Meaning of Truth*, p. 145.

[57] My interpretation is at odds with the shift in tense that James makes in the passage Putnam focuses on. There, in discussing Ptolemaic astronomy, Aristotelian logic, etc., James says that "when new experiences lead to retrospective judgments, using the past tense, what these judgments utter *was* true, even though no past thinker had been led there" (*Pragmatism*, p. 107). On my reading, James slips when he says "true" instead of "real" here, as he notes in *Meaning of Truth*, where he writes that "Realities are not *true*, they *are*; and beliefs are true of them" (p. 106). James further supports this in his letter to A. C. Lane: "Truths involving the past's *relations* to *later things* can't come into being till the later things exist, so such truths may grow and alter, but the past itself is beyond the reach of modification" (in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 479). As truth is for James only applicable to ideas and statements, and our present claims about the past are themselves later, particular claims, what these judgments utter in fact was *not* true before the later statements were themselves realities, thus allowing the relation of truth to be instantiated.

psychological animation, I do not mean to say that he simply reduces truth to current belief, as Royce implied. On the contrary, truth for James is constrained by whatever facts can be had, where these facts may potentially vary independently of our expectations of them. In understanding James this way, it is crucial to recognize that for James, unlike Peirce, "truth" and "reality" cannot in principle ever be thought to be identical. Since for James truth applies only to statements or ideas, it varies dependently both on our other beliefs (our context of knowledge about, both individual and social) and on our necessarily selective cognition of our concrete experiences (our context of direct acquaintance taken in the second intention).[58] Truths are thus not identical with reality, since reality – as that which we experience in direct acquaintance, cognize through selective attention, and test opinions of through the function of knowledge about – overflows our ability to cognize it. As James indicates in *A Pluralistic Universe*, "only 'reason' deals with closed equations; nature is but a name for excess."[59] Since our cognitions relate us to reality, and relate both us and reality to the good in progress, our cognitions are none the lesser by this limitation. However, our cognitions and statements are in fact always separable (though never simply separate) from the reality to which we relate through them, separable in particular by virtue of their variable but mutually exclusive boundaries.[60] *Pace* Peirce, reality is not what we shall believe it to be in the final opinion, though it includes that. Rather, it encompasses for James the independent parts of the world of pure experience, the ejective "much at onceness," parts of which will have incited us to formulate and revise whatever truths we can arrive at in our attempts to relate our human aims to that which is independent of us. Reality and its alter ego "fact," then, will in the final opinion themselves prove to have been absolute, complete with all our additions to them. What knowledge we have and what truth we think of them, however, will remain relative qua knowledge and truth – relative both to that absolute concreteness that is fact itself and to the particulars of our situations as knowers, however collective, inclusive of reality, and consensual those situations may become.

[58] Discussing the misunderstanding of his view, James writes that "it probably comes from confusing the terms 'reality' and 'truth' – realities are independent variables, but truths about them are functions also of other variables, and must alter." James to A. C. Lane, 28 October 1907, in Perry, *Thought and Character*, vol. II, p. 478.

[59] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 129.

[60] By this I have in mind that a truth, taken metaphysically, links two systems of associates which are nonetheless different. See chapter 1 concerning direct acquaintance for this notion.

To turn back to Putnam's analysis, this disjunction between reality and truth is, for Putnam, James's downfall. For, where James is willing to bind truth (that which is true in so far forth) to fact while nonetheless conceptually loosing reality from truth absolute, Putnam, like Peirce, finds such a conception to violate our very notion of the meaning of truth. On Putnam's reading James is forced into a situation where he must deny the intuition of the disquotational principle, that for any judgment *p*, *p* is equivalent to the judgment that *p* is true. Putnam's example is the guilt or innocence of Lizzie Borden, something about which there was no doubt a reality, although not necessarily a clear truth (excepting Lizzie Borden herself). If the judgment that Lizzie Borden committed the murders becomes coercive over thought although the reality happens to have been that she did not, Putnam notes, then on his reading of James's view, the judgment that *p* is true will not be equivalent to that *p*.[61]

Putnam takes the example to be devastating for James, and moves immediately to an inquest into the cause of the failure, which he credits to a wrongheaded understanding of conception on James's part. But is the objection so devastating? If James does not, in fact, endorse a substantive conception of absolute truth, as I have argued, then the status of the judgment that *p* is true cannot be considered absolute, as Putnam requires. Further, on James's view, should we be in the position of knowing more definitively the fact that *p* (or not *p*), *then revision of the truthfulness of the judgment would follow dynamically*. What Putnam shows, then, is not that James violates the intuition of the disquotational principle, but rather that James grants no absolute logical status either to any particular truth claim or to any counterfactual.[62] On this view, truth claims – however stable – are only ever hypothetical and provisional; moreover, counterfactuals, should they evince some concrete grounding in fact, are only the beginnings of new trails of inquiry that lead to the revision of old truths or the addition of new ones. For James, then, there are falsification conditions for any given truth claim, but no absolute verification conditions, regardless of how stable the truth claim may be as an experiential function. He writes in *The Will to Believe* that as an empiricist he believes that we can in fact attain truth, but not that we can know infallibly when we have.[63] The disquotational

61 See Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," pp. 182–3.
62 See the previous chapter's discussion of James's contextualization of the contributions of logic to rationality.
63 James, *Will to Believe*, p. 20.

principle, then, indicates in general the critical difference on which realism insists between truth and merely justified belief; it does not, however, function to distinguish the truth of our particular claims to knowledge. For that we must continue to pursue our varied, complex, individual, and intersubjective processes of knowing in the world of pure experience, insufficient though they may be to our pressing questions about the truth of our most important ideas.

ANTICIPATIONS

One of the guiding ideas of this study of James's *Weltanschauung* is that what is distinctive about James's contribution to philosophy and critical thought, particularly concerning religion, is novel in important ways with reference both to his day and ours. This insight is evident and I hope substantially defended in my attention to: the importance of James's developing and abiding interest in metaphysics over descriptive psychology; his desideratum of a philosophy adapted to religious needs; his desire to elucidate knowing rather than truth; and his development of a pluralistic, dynamic (functional) understanding of reality and our activities within it in place of the variety of reductive, static, substantialist views variously known under the banners of idealism and materialism.

While I have sought in this text to demonstrate the systematic character of James's otherwise apparently diverse interests and ideas in the last two decades of his life, I have also endeavored to underscore the metaphysical intent behind his own thinking. This has led to both direct and indirect investigations of the character of: (1) what James takes metaphysics to be; (2) his own metaphysical constructions; and (3) the close connection of these constructions to his understanding of and interest in religion. This turn to metaphysics was commonplace in James's day. In the remainder of the century of American philosophy and critical thought launched by James and his contemporaries, however, the move to metaphysics in general, and to metaphysics responsive to human religiousness in particular, has fallen into disrepute. Part of my interest in investigating James's thought from the perspective of metaphysical questions has been driven by the recognition that James had a different and perhaps more productive conception of metaphysics to offer than that which has been so roundly criticized this century. This form of thinking metaphysically – about basic conceptions, about how we understand reality and our relations to it – resonates with what

Cornel West has recently identified as an "heuristic historical" approach to theory, one which he laments has been eschewed too thoroughly by neo-pragmatists in their rejection of "grand theory."[64] It is with a view toward the critical appropriation of such a discourse, then, that I wish to relate this analysis, if only suggestively and schematically, to other contemporary discussions in critical thought and religion.

Such an appropriation would not be so much a reconsideration as something of a novel engagement. James's project did meet with great enthusiasm and vociferous resistance in his day – both marks of serious engagement. But the history of philosophy, critical thought, and the study of religion in America and Europe after his death developed in such ways that the insights of James's views, in particular the varied commitments of radical empiricism as a systematic, spiritualistic world-view, were never fully explored, much less embraced. In philosophy James's pragmatism and his psychology (as a philosophy of mind) have been most interrogated, albeit generally as independent from the rest of his corpus, particularly its more metaphysical parts.[65] In the study of religion, James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* has become a paradigmatic text, particularly for undergraduate instruction. The text appears to be read most frequently, however, as something of an enchanting compendium, stylishly written, compelling, and thus almost exclusively desirable for its ability to attract students to the field. Any value of James as a theoretical contributor to the study of religion is usually limited to a rather untheoretical reading of his hypothetical "definition" of religion, his provisional conclusions, and his characterizations of mysticism in that text.

The two lectures on mysticism in *Varieties* themselves have proved among the most influential of James's writings, almost singlehandedly founding and invigorating a broad segment of the phenomenology and philosophy of religion for nearly a century. From Evelyn Underhill and Rudolph Otto to recent writers such as William Alston and G. William Barnard, James's frequently anthologized serial listing of the phenomenological features of mystical experience has been invoked to support project after project that examines mystical experience as the *sine qua non* of religion. Only in theology, particularly in its process movements, have James's metaphysical views received serious consideration – from such thinkers as Whitehead, Wieman, and their

[64] West, *Keeping Faith*, p. 136.

[65] There are, of course, noteworthy exceptions to all of these generalizations. I speak broadly, here, about the development of the mainstream discussions.

contemporary interpreters. Needless to say, however, these views have by no means dominated the scene.[66]

The central purpose of this book has been to tender a different perspective on James, attentive both to his paramount metaphysical interests and to the centrality of religion in the development and articulation of those same concerns. This book's goal, however, is funded not only by my interest in James's thought, but also by my investment in the contemporary discourses just mentioned. While space does not permit a thorough treatment of each of these arenas of reflection, both in terms of how James has been received and what, in detail, this reading might offer, I do want to anticipate at least some of the outlines of what I perceive as interesting and novel contributions this study of James might make to these fields. In what follows, then, I will briefly sketch potential contributions to philosophy, the philosophy of religion, and theology. Much work remains, even to develop these as suggestions. But as James wrote in *Varieties*, "a bill of fare with one real raisin on it rather than the word 'raisin' . . . might be an inadequate meal, but it would at least be a commencement of reality."[67] What follows is meant at least as a gesture toward that beginning, if not the commencement itself.

Philosophy

This treatment of James is intended in many respects to be a contribution to the discipline of philosophy. In its reconstructive and historical detail it seeks to revise and enlarge the prevailing understanding of James as one of the foremost figures in American – if not Western – philosophy at the turn of the century, and in so doing, also to recast our understanding of American philosophy in that period. In its critical mode, this study intends to raise new issues, ideas, and approaches for a variety of areas of interest in contemporary philosophical discussion. While the emphases of these two endeavors are manifold, and are really only to be found piecemeal in the foregoing chapters, here I can underline several guiding recognitions. First, and perhaps foremost, I have sought to represent James's thought as systematic through and through, driven differentially by a wide range of concerns, but

[66] Nancy Frankenberry's *Religion and Radical Empiricism*, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) is perhaps the most noteworthy of recent process-oriented theologians engaging James's metaphysical views.

[67] James, *Varieties*, p. 394.

always attentive to his chief philosophical value of systematic consistency and the fundamental philosophical drive for insight and clarity. Second, and growing from this systematic character, I have attended in detail to James's particular metaphysical interests and ideas as the principal medium for his systematic thinking. Third, and of no less *philosophical* importance, I have sought to exhibit the centrality of religion in the formation and functioning of James's philosophical worldview as systematic metaphysics.

Part of my purpose has been to rehabilitate James's rather novel, functional (or pragmatic) understanding of the nature and value of metaphysics itself as a vital and viable philosophical field that seeks maximum insight into the world as a whole. James's own philosophical interests are holistic, considering together what are now most frequently treated separately: epistemology, metaphysics (particularly ontology), philosophy of mind, ethics, and the philosophy of religion. One Jamesian reason for considering these issues together (beyond the merely historical fact that James did) is to query, if only indirectly, the cost of the fragmentation driven by the forms of specialization that now dominate philosophy as a discipline. The interrelation of James's ideas and the fecundity of thought and insight that derives in part from that integration suggest that there may be significant value in reconsidering holistic metaphysical systematicness as an enterprise, at least in a fallibilistic, functional mode such as James's.[68]

In addition to these general issues, I have also sought to raise again for philosophical consideration the particularities of James's own metaphysical view, replete with its dual interest in the world known as system and the world as directly experienced in actual human life. On my interpretation, one of the cardinal insights of James's *Weltanschauung* is the centrality of concrete, lived or "pure" experience. What is interesting and productive about this commitment is the manner in which James pursues it philosophically. Like many, he seeks to provide a metaphysical or systematic account of the world and our place in it; what is novel, however, is his desire that it be as inclusive as possible of all of the details of lived experience as lived, both immediate and

[68] The fact that the readership of philosophy among the educated public in the United States has diminished significantly is due in part to the high degree of specialization within philosophy, as well as to the substantive character of some of those specialized projects that have animated the discourse this century. In the discussion of where post-analytic philosophy should go, reconsidering James and his colleagues who treat philosophy as an holistic, humanistic, non-dogmatic enterprise is, I think, potentially valuable.

reflective, regardless of how "unphilosophical" these may seem. In doing this James seeks critically to hold off temptations toward reduction, whether reduction to a quasi-mystical phenomenalism that eschews valuable reflective insights – scientific and philosophical – or reduction that privileges the philosophical or scientific account over the concrete, diverse first-order experiences that are its spark. Philosophy (and science, for that matter) is to James a human activity involving multiple dimensions of rationality – intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and practical at minimum.[69] It would be a violation of our need to seek a balance of rationality, on James's view, to advance a philosophical position that factored out of its account precisely the reasons (and persons) giving rise to, animating, and sustaining inquiry in the first place. James's attempt to analyze and interrelate lived experience and our various interests (philosophical, scientific, aesthetic, moral, religious), while nonetheless retaining an equal footing for the novelty and concreteness of that experience as lived, is thus a central and valuable insight for philosophy. Moreover, the manner in which he pursues this – by deploying a minimalist, heuristic, interrelated set of metaphysical conceptions in a pluralistic environment that takes fallibilistic, dynamic function as its watchword – is provocative and instructive.[70]

The principal metaphysical notion for James's *Weltanschauung* is pure experience, replete with its integration of phenomenological and metaphysical analyses and its complex intertwining of the dual modalities of knowing also explicated by James. In proposing this basic conception, he provides an alternative means of construing the philosophical substratum out of which we comprehend ordinary, scientific, philosophical, and religious objects, be they linguistic, material, physical, mental, social, or otherwise. In proposing a pluralistically complex yet formally singular (or monistic) metaphysical conception, James actually invokes an environmental and social model of reality. On this view all components and existents must be understood fundamentally via both their independent constitutive features (what James has in mind in endorsing a version of panpsychism) and their relational characteristics, stable and dynamic. While "pure experience" itself might be too peculiar a notion for some to embrace, the features of and reasons for James's turn to it themselves deserve close consideration.

[69] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 55.

[70] Elsewhere I have characterized this move as a "homeopathic" one, emphasizing its minimalism and also the "likeness" of the central conception "experience" to the problem being discussed. See Lamberth, "Intimations of the Finite."

This turn to experience not only has possibilities for erasing the hegemony of longstanding dualisms and avoiding certain forms of reductive thinking; in addition, it offers an alternative way of considering the relations among language, thought, and the various other elements making up the world. One of the interesting aspects of James's radically empiricist account of the functions of knowing is the manner in which it embarks (if not makes land) on a different account of language, conception, and reference.[71] James's position comprehends functional aspects of the standard representationalist models of thought, but it is neither driven nor limited by such an account. Instead, on his view our thoughts, ideas, and language usages run the gamut from intimately stemming from and connecting us to a concrete, ejective universe to functioning separately in a radical degree from the otherwise independent components of the world of pure experience. There is, for James, no sense to talking about the world as it is anyway, since talk and thought are our talk and our thought, and thus never non-perspectival. On the other hand, James's understanding does allow us to formulate meaningful questions and develop, test, and revise concrete answers concerning what in experience derives from our conceptual contributions and what seems to have particular autonomous features. The "real world" is, then, neither absolutized nor dispensed with, but rather engaged by a complex set of expectations for our analyses. Such an engagement, which, for example, might productively add to the internalism/externalism debate in the contemporary philosophy of mind, as well as reopen significant mainstream philosophical debates about the status of religious experiences and their objects, deserves closer scrutiny.[72]

In the conclusion to *A Pluralistic Universe* James summarizes his efforts at Oxford, claiming that if only one point of method is understood, he would almost be willing to let the rest of his suggestions go. Clarifying that one point, he writes:

It is high time for the basis of discussion in these questions to be broadened and thickened up. It is for that that I have brought in Fechner and Bergson, and descriptive

[71] Putnam notes this possibility, but sees James to have abandoned the view in the pragmatism discourse. Putnam ultimately faults James's theory of truth on the grounds of a flawed theory of conception. I would concur that the pragmatism discussions often revert from the insights of his analysis when formulating radical empiricism; on my reading, however, the latter should be prioritized in understanding the former. See Putnam, "James's Theory of Truth," p. 183.

[72] Sprigge has had the most interesting things to say about James on this topic to date. See particularly "James, Aboutness, and his British Critics."

psychology and religious experiences, and have ventured even to hint at psychical research and other wild beasts of the philosophic desert.[73]

Continuing, James implores the younger members of his audience to shape the philosophy of the future through imitating the sciences by taking "the actual peculiarities of the world" more fully into account. In the nine decades of philosophy since James's death, an engagement with science has indeed predominated, albeit a rather un-Jamesian one. It seems that American philosophy has taken greater note of James's methodological pointer toward the sciences than it has of his underlying desideratum of broadening and thickening up philosophical reflection with the panoply of gothic, muddled details of human experience. Perhaps along that deserted path new and productive ideas still await, dwelling amidst the wild beasts.

Philosophy of religion

One of the actual peculiarities of experience to which James was unwaveringly committed is that group known collectively after his Gifford Lectures as "religious experience." As I mentioned earlier, the history of the philosophy of religion in the twentieth century (not to mention that of the study of religion) cannot effectively be told without reference to the influence of James's discussions of the varieties of religious experience in general and mysticism in particular. From the analysis of this book it should be clear that I do not subscribe to the standard reading of James on which his comments about mysticism are taken paradigmatically to represent his understanding of religion. Nor do I find his endorsement of an empirical yet reductive science of religions as the model for the philosophy of religion particularly promising.[74] I do, however, think that James's turn to experience – understood in the broader context of his radical empiricism – is of crucial, substantive importance to the philosophy of religion, now and in the future.

From David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* down to the present, philosophical reflection about religion in the modern period has often been concerned in one manner or another with the justification of religious beliefs, most frequently those concerning the existence

[73] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 149.

[74] The *locus classicus* for this is at the end of James's lecture "Philosophy" in *Varieties*, p. 359. James also discussed this idea overtly in his "Summer School of Theology Lectures on 'Intellect and Feeling in Religion'" in 1902 (James, *Manuscript Lectures*, pp. 86ff.).

of God.[75] In the twentieth century much of this discussion has taken its cue from the preceding century's turn to experience, generally attributed in theology to Schleiermacher but often directly associated with James as well.[76] From Rudolph Otto's *Das Heilige* and C. D. Broad's classic "The Appeal to Religious Experience" to recent discussions of the evidentiary role of mystical (or manifestation) experiences for theistic belief, the evidential connection between religious belief and religious experience and the evaluation of mystical experiences as paradigmatic among religious experiences have been consistently plumbed.[77] Moreover, as the defense of the philosophical value of such experiences and beliefs has grown, so have responses to the contrary, engendering a range of analyses of the nature of mystical experiences in particular and the philosophical role of religious experience in general.[78]

In suggesting that James's turn to experience in radical empiricism is potentially valuable for the philosophy of religion, I do not have in mind the use of James in buttressing these evidentiary arguments for particular religious beliefs.[79] Instead, I am interested in the rather different directions to which James's radically empiricist ideas might lead, should we look away from justifying *individual* beliefs through analyzing discrete experiences and orient ourselves instead toward thinking of experience as an all-encompassing field within which there are a wide

[75] Michael McGhee concurs with this in his introduction to *Philosophy, Religion and the Spiritual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 1. One might also reach back to Descartes's *Meditations* to support this observation, although I would argue that he has a different set of presuppositions from Hume about the relation of faith to philosophy.

[76] Wayne Proudfoot's *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) is instructive on the history of this turn. I would, however, interpret both Schleiermacher and James differently from the way he does in that work.

[77] Broad's essay can be found in *Religion, Philosophy, and Psychical Research: Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1953). William P. Alston and William J. Wainwright are two good examples of contemporary philosophers of religion currently pursuing this tack. See *inter alia*, Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Wainwright, *Mysticism: A Study of its Nature, Cognitive Value and Moral Implications* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981).

[78] See, e.g., the two edited volumes by Stephen Katz, *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978) and *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983) with respect to the former and Proudfoot's *Religious Experience* regarding the latter.

[79] James is, I think, persuasive in *Varieties* in arguing that, although mystical experiences may phenomenologically appear to be veridical for their subjects, at the philosophical or metaphysical level there can be no clear means for these experiences directly to ground public or intersubjective claims about their putative objects. Instead, these claims, like other experientially derived beliefs, must be tested, substantiated, and revised in connection with our complete stock of truths. Given the nature of their objects, this testing is problematic in comparison to claims derived from ordinary sense experience, and ultimately only indirect. While I do not have space to consider the arguments closely here, I am not persuaded to contravene James's conclusions on the philosophical value of any particular religious experience.

variety of discrete "experiences" – some religious – all situated in broader environmental contexts. What I mean to highlight is the promising character of James's pluralistic, concrete, *social* metaphysics, along with its correlative functional conceptions of knowing and acting, and its novel understanding of degrees of rationality in relation to human interests and experience. For a field that focuses its philosophical efforts on developing a basic framework for understanding such a multi-faceted set of phenomena as religion, such a world-view deserves serious consideration.

While the turn to experience by many in the contemporary philosophy of religion has not as yet been particularly Jamesian, it has not been without fruit. One of the limitations of some prior efforts to understand religion philosophically (many Enlightenment views, for example) has been the marginalization of concrete experiences charged with immediacy and particularity in favor of the reduction of religion to wholly abstract "religious ideas." The return to experience for justifying beliefs in contemporary discussion has drawn attention again to the phenomenology of actual experience, mystical or otherwise religious. It has yielded interesting studies and proposals on the affirmative side and complex, hermeneutical insights about the over-determined contextual aspects of all experience, religious in particular, from the more skeptical side.[80]

Both of these efforts have, however, come at significant cost. On the one hand, endeavors demonstrating the value of religious experience for the justification of belief have generally advanced naive versions of realism in making their cases plausible. In so doing, they have eschewed the deep and valuable insights associated with Continental critical thought and hermeneutics from the late eighteenth century to the present. Whether the latter are construed according to Kant's analysis of our faculty of knowing, Hegelian or Marxist historicism, Peircean or Saussurean semiotics, Jamesian pragmatism, Heideggerian phenomenology, or Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis – not to mention more recent forms of critical, social, and cultural analysis – they demand intellectual attention. On the other hand, critics of the evidentiary value of religious experience have often taken these critical discourses and insights to reductive extremes, thus diminishing the range and character

[80] In addition to Wainwright and Alston on the affirmative side, see, e.g., Keith Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). On the more skeptical side, see in particular Katz's chapter in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* and Proudfoot's *Religious Experience*.

of issues for analysis and understanding. Both positions ultimately radicalize the debate in the philosophy of religion, leaving each side impoverished and the prospects for the field as a whole diminished.

Wayne Proudfoot's *Religious Experience* is interesting with respect to this debate. The argument of the book is designed to demonstrate through a subtle historical and theoretical analysis how the phenomenologically descriptive and explanatory modes of considering religious experience can be meaningfully distinguished, thus allowing for each moment to be valued and differentially developed in understanding religious phenomena. Proudfoot argues against reduction in the descriptive moment, while suggesting that reduction is, in fact, implicit in the quest for explanation. By separating these moments through analysis, Proudfoot seeks to defang "protective strategies" internal to religious accounts and even some theoretical understandings of religion (for example, Eliade). He therefore makes way for the explanatory, reductive task to proceed without being conflated with the equally necessary, yet expansive, descriptive enterprise.[81] As such, then, Proudfoot's position is in many respects oriented in the direction to which I am suggesting James's turn to experience can lead.

What, then, is the novel value of James's understanding of experience? Proudfoot's position is exceptionally helpful in distinguishing not only the confusion between description and explanation, but also their interrelation – analytically in religious phenomena and historically in the development of the debate about religious experience. At the same time, however, Proudfoot's analysis appears (perhaps unintentionally) to foreclose precisely the question he would seem to be opening for scrutiny, namely: What might be (an) adequate philosophical explanation(s) for phenomena now known under the category religious experience? Put simply, Proudfoot's own uninterrogated explanatory framework for religious phenomena seems to be one of a linguistically nuanced but nonetheless reductive scientific naturalism, on which "natural" causes (qua scientific causes) are *assumed* from the outset to be both the underlying causes and the ultimate acceptable explanations for religious phenomena.[82] The fact that this assumption would go unchallenged by many

[81] Proudfoot's analysis is slightly more complex, since he notes that explanations themselves are implicit in the phenomenology of experience, at least when identified as religious. As a result, there is a descriptive moment with respect to explanations internal to experience that must be separated from the second-order explanatory task.

[82] What is meant by "natural" is the critical question not addressed directly, but rather restrictively assumed. The issue is only really implicit in the book *Religious Experience*, but evidence of it seems clear, for example, in Proudfoot's discussions of miracles and the section on the

in the contemporary academy – despite our inability fully to explain nature (much less scientific inquiry or other human social activities) in its *concrete* detail in the current terms of scientific naturalism – does not in itself justify presuming this world-view.

As James repeatedly argued almost a century ago, one crucial question evinced by the persistence of religious phenomena (or questions of free will, as a non-religious example) in the scientific era would seem to concern precisely the adequacy of our dominant, reductive metaphysical world-views (idealistic or materialistic in his day, naturalistic or physicalist in our own) in accounting for the concrete details of the "thickness" of experience as it comes, whether classed as "natural," "supernatural," or otherwise. On radical empiricism's methodological thesis, everything that is must be understood in terms of experience. Since the distinction between naturalism and supernaturalism must itself be rendered wholly within experiential confines on a Jamesian analysis, the standard understanding of it is thus reopened for revision and clarification, rather than merely being left uninterrogated or jettisoned. Naturalism in the twentieth century tends, I think, to be as dogmatically invested in the modern naturalism/supernaturalism bifurcation as are views committed to dualistic theism, albeit by vehemently denying one side of the split.[83] James, unfortunately, does not offer new terminology for the distinction, focusing as he does on the distinction between refined and piecemeal supernaturalism as his relevant concern.[84] He does, however, propose a completely different world-view from ours that comprehends the realm of scientific inquiry, yet only as a subset of the world of pure experience. His analysis thus radically

explanation of religious experience (e.g., pp. 146, 217). For a recent, engaging theological defense of naturalism that is philosophically sophisticated, see, e.g., Charley Hardwick's *Events of Grace: Naturalism, Existentialism, and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Hardwick summarizes his own understanding of naturalism (qua non-reductive physicalism) as involving the claims: (1) that only the world of nature is real; (2) that nature is necessary (in the sense of not being externally caused); (3) that nature can be understood without an appeal to purposiveness; (4) that all causes are natural causes, and all events the result of natural causes; and then, more problematically (5) that natural science is the only sound method for establishing knowledge and (6) that value is based solely on the interests of human beings (5–6). The most severe problem from a Jamesian perspective comes with the assumption of (4), which is exacerbated when conjoined with (5), particularly as modern scientific methods have developed. The chief problem with this has to do with understanding human explanation and understanding to be fully exhausted by the conception(s) of scientific causality. In light of this, proposition (3) is trivially true, in that nature can be so understood, as long as one is content not to understand any claims concerning purposiveness.

83 Dualistic theism also denies the natural in terms of value, although not *in toto*. They are thus not direct inversions.

84 See James, *Varieties*, pp. 409–10.

transforms the possibilities for understanding such things as religious experience, and in so doing, opens new avenues of investigation.

On my reading James does not presume that the interpretations offered by subjects of religious experiences, much less those of religious persons second-hand, are by virtue of their provenance adequate. He does, however, think that we must have sufficient reason for reducing such phenomena to a set of terms that do not, ultimately, allow meaningful representation of the details and the effects of the concrete immediacy of the experience being explained. "What counts as a good explanation?" is, then, precisely the question James wants to open for analysis. Considering James closely suggests that we should not adopt a theoretical stance that presumptively protects dominant metaphysical assumptions concerning "scientific" or "naturalistic" explanations from such scrutiny any more than we should adopt such a protective strategy for religious explanations and experiences.[85]

In James's own 1907 consideration of the religious philosophy best adapted to human religious needs, the options available were materialism, dualistic theism, and two versions of pantheism: absolute idealism and radical empiricism.[86] Given the nineteenth century's general dissatisfaction theoretically with dualistic theism, and from his own frustration with materialism as a scientist, James ruled out both of these views and focused instead on the choice between absolute idealism and radical empiricism, arguing for the latter. Historically, his proposal was unsuccessful. Absolute idealism did fade from the scene, but radical empiricism itself was quickly eclipsed both by materialism in the scientific and "humanistic" spheres, and the post-war reinvigoration of dualistic theism in theology and the philosophy of religion.[87] Hence some of the most interesting insights in James's radical pluralism have still received "little countenance."[88]

The current debate about religious experience in all its facets is still definitively shaped by the quintessentially modern antithesis of dualistic theism and naturalism (often as materialism). Radical empiricism,

85 Given his argument, Proudfoot should second this claim on theoretical grounds.

86 James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 16–20. I am reading *A Pluralistic Universe* here as the fulfillment of the promise of *Varieties*.

87 Some of the characteristics of idealism were carried through in the neo-orthodox inspired developments of dualistic theism. Much of the rationalist discussion about the existence and attributes of God and the problem of evil which I have not mentioned here can be classed as a partial descendant of the idealistic tradition, stripped of its pantheism and reintegrated with the presupposition of ontological dualism between God and the world.

88 James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 26.

I would suggest, is ripe for reconsideration as a metaphysical view relevant to the philosophy of religion precisely because in its details it is driven by a recognition of: (1) the severe conceptual limitations of dualistic theism and its frequently attendant naive realism; and (2) the empirical and thus "rational" (in a Jamesian sense) inadequacies of variations of naturalism or materialism, particularly with respect to comprehending and explaining the human enterprises that make up the various sciences and the concrete human experiences of and interests in such intimate areas of experience as the religious. Strongly in its favor in this climate is radical empiricism's fallibilistically empirical method vis-à-vis theory and metaphysics – namely, its habit of subjecting its own metaphysical assumptions in turn to critique, testing, and revision in a dynamic, empirically informed but rationally accountable form of inquiry. Such an open, minimally presumptive stage for investigation could be of significant benefit, not the least for its piecemeal ability to retain and interrelate the variant insights developed over the last century of investigation. More importantly, however, such a worldview would facilitate both: (1) the productive reopening of a range of presumptively foreclosed questions for novel reconsideration; and (2) the development of new insights. The need for what James called a "spiritualistic" philosophy, tempered by a nuanced, pluralistic understanding of rationality, is certainly no less great at the end of the twentieth century than it was at the beginning. In fact, it may be greater.

Theology

For James the distinction between philosophy, the study of religion (philosophical or otherwise), and theological reflection is not particularly clear. This derives in part from his nineteenth-century vantage, on which much of philosophy is, in fact, still fundamentally spiritualistic or supernaturalist, engaging normative theological questions as part and parcel of its task.[89] The fading of these separable arenas of investigation also stems, however, from the character and scope of James's metaphysical vision, which pluralistically incorporates into a "federal republic" all of the different human enterprises of knowing, as well as all of their objects, varied though they may be.[90] As a result, the disciplinary distinctions that animate many twentieth-century discussions

[89] See James's comments in *Varieties*, p. 409, and *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 14–23.
[90] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 145.

prove foreign in many respects to an inherently interdisciplinary, Jamesian perspective.

A good example of this may be seen in the naturalism/supernaturalism question raised above. While theoretically open to a purely "philosophical" analysis within the philosophy of religion, the inquiry into an alternative way of understanding this distinction is simultaneously a crucial topic for the study of religion as a separate discipline or field.[91] This is so because precisely how one describes and categorizes concrete religious activities and experiences of human beings in relation to "the divine" (in James's broad sense) depends critically on the world-view into which those relations, via description and explanation, are cast. Radically separating the descriptive and analytical moments by discipline, then, is not really possible on a Jamesian view, as they must be dialectically integrated in some meaningful sense for concrete work to proceed in either field.

While comprehensible within the province of both the philosophy and the study of religion, the supernatural/natural issue (again merely as exemplary) also admits, however, of discernibly theological import. This becomes clear when one moves from the mode of seeking "exclusively theoretical" insight and "simply adequate" description to comprehending our place as human beings in the world of pure experience. On James's view, we are always environmentally enmeshed in the world of pure experience, socially related to a piecemeal reality – past, present, and future – that is still fully in the making. Past facts are determined as facts, but their interconnections with the present and future are still open to change. As such, all our cognitive practices critically figure in the very constitution of reality – future, present, and by extension past as well – along with the otherwise independent and variable conditions of the particular environment in question.

The theological moment in all of this comes, as James was fond of pointing out, when the current facts are insufficient with respect to determining the future – what James in *The Will to Believe* calls the instance of a "moral question," of which all meaningful religious hypotheses are a sub-class.[92] On a radically empiricist understanding of human inquiry, one cannot simply fathom the question of religion

[91] This view of the philosophy of religion is rather un-Jamesian, since he demands consideration of the empirical and eschews the "purely" philosophical, understood as purely logical or rational.

[92] James, *Will to Believe*, pp. 27, 30. See also the "faith-ladder" at the end of *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148.

from an external perspective, independently from taking a position on "faith." For, even if one seeks simply to describe a religious phenomenon or merely to plumb the rationality of an argument, in the activity of such engagement one must routinely choose between what James calls the two separable laws of the knower: (1) know the truth, and (2) avoid error.[93] In the choice between these competing yet not necessarily correlated laws lies the facilitating space and the pressing necessity for theological reflection and, should one be so disposed, the opportunity for religious engagement.[94]

Thinking, for James, whether about science, history, philosophy, or theology, is a fundamentally moral endeavor, a situated form of practice that repeatedly requires the concrete wagers of faith with respect to particular hypotheses. In the cases of thinking about religious phenomena in particular, or the more general, metaphysical task of thinking clearly about the world as a whole, such "moral" and "religious" questions are never far from hand, querying as they do: (1) the relations between reality as it is and reality as it ought to be, and (2) the continual issues concerning our relations to both. Whether this is formulated in theistic terms, through the model of the finite God James proffers, for example, or in any other set of conceptions, the practice of making theological judgments is incumbent on anyone who seeks deeply to know. Moreover, as James intimates throughout his corpus, metaphysical and religious investigations share one critical feature as avenues of inquiry: they both deal with things which are, fundamentally, as yet incomplete. Our role in filling out the facts, however constrained, is both critical and unavoidable. Not all ideas, religious or philosophical, will prove successful in the rational senses of resonating with immediate experience and integrating with our stock of truths. But those ideas we do advance will affect the outcome of reality in concrete ways, and the issue is whether that effect will make the world more intimate or more foreign.[95]

In addition to casting the theological task, empirically engaged and fallibilistically understood, as a central part of human knowledge and

[93] James, *Will to Believe*, p. 24. Note that in all cases it is necessary that the question at hand not be self-contradictory. See, e.g., *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148 for the clearest statement of this.

[94] I say "so disposed" because James's psychological reflections on temperament run parallel to this analysis, thus casting serious question on his "tough-minded" optimistic voluntarism in the will to believe passages. As James notes in *Varieties*, not all are capable of conversion (p. 168). By extension, exercising the will to believe may not, in fact, be best characterized at all times as a choice.

[95] See Lamberth, "Interpreting the Universe After a Social Analogy."

inquiry, James's metaphysics of experience is critical to contemporary theology for other, more historically specific reasons. At the end of the twentieth century the modern theological project finds itself at a decisive juncture. The developments of historical, social, and cultural analysis that began to be voiced in the historicism of Hegel and the critical social theory of Marx in the nineteenth century have borne much fruit in our time, yielding a diverse range of thoroughgoing, highly productive modes of analysis that account totally for human activity independently of the phenomenology of human beings as willing, participating subjects.[96] Theology in the latter half of the twentieth century has profited greatly from these enterprises, gaining sophistication in understanding the human condition and, significantly, developing deep and far-reaching self-critical understandings of the role of theological and religious institutions and ideas in the promotion of oppressions on the basis of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion.

One difficulty with many of these current modes of social analysis is that they do both too much and too little. Such theories do too much in the sense that they, much like forms of scientific naturalism, appear to explain all of the world of our experience and seem convincingly to do so, yet all the while without critical reference to features of our experience available to us as human subjects – human experiences of goodness, evil, strength, fortitude or failure of will, solidarity, grace, or faith. At the same time, such theories also explain too little, particularly for theological and moral investigation. This is so because they do not offer a means theoretically to understand the normative connection between the forces of the environment that over-determine our experiences and those other, subjective, experiential forces that we as human beings – certainly as morally or theologically committed persons – must interrogate, develop, and ultimately, act on. As James's analysis of the moral character of our acts of knowing highlights, a theoretical understanding that takes no account of the roles of human beings in the world qua human experiencers does not seem adequate to the facts of experience as we have them.

Much as with the naturalism/supernaturalism or even the realism/antirealism debate, scholars have tended to diverge widely on this

[96] The idea of discourse analysis developed by Foucault is a good example of one of these theoretical frameworks, as is Frederic Jameson's work. See also Talal Asad's provocative characterization of the power and character of these modes of social analysis in disjunction from phenomenological inquiries in *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 16. I have written at greater length about this problem in "Intimations of the Finite."

question, with some eschewing the phenomenology of the subject in exclusive favor of "discursive" views, while others have renounced these systematic insights that add so much to our understandings of the human environment. While taking sides may be possible for many in the academy on account of peculiarities of disciplinary specialization, for those interested in theology in particular (or ethics as well), such a decision is impossible. Theologically, there is no point in giving up the phenomenology (or perspective) of the subject, as it is to the understanding of human beings as living, spirited beings in relation to the ultimate that theology is oriented. At the same time, however, there is no way for theologians to give back the deep insights of the last two centuries of social and historical analysis, since it is explicitly through those developments that our insights into the particular, recalcitrant structures of human sin and evil and the corresponding concrete actions necessary for liberation have been so much more thoroughly developed. As Rebecca Chopp has argued, what theology needs is a *critical* theory that engages metaphysical questions relevant to the central theological task in order to see its way forward.[97]

Designed as a radical yet mediating proposal (much as pragmatism itself was presented), James's metaphysics of radical empiricism is particularly apropos of this nexus of issues. As I have interpreted it here, James's world-view makes space for the parallel developments of subject- and discourse-oriented inquiries, both in its twofold interpretation of knowing and in its dual metaphysics of pure experience, which admits of both narrow, immediate and broader, mediated perspectives. More than just entertaining both discourses, however, James's view seeks from the outset precisely to articulate the fundamental functional and metaphysical interrelations between the objects and methods of both discourses. The double-barreled conception of experience, pluralistically taken and socially rendered, allows one to schematize "objects" for analysis that run the gamut from a subjective intention to a physical impediment or precondition to a socially produced and distributed perception *without separating them from other critical, environmental, or subjective connections*. Metaphysically, all such objects are on an equal footing in James's system. The pressing question with respect to explanation, then, is not reduction but rather the articulation of interrelation with respect both to concrete particularity and to dynamic, systemic function.

[97] See Rebecca Chopp, "Feminist Queries and Metaphysical Musings," in *Rethinking Metaphysics*, L. Gregory Jones and Stephen E. Fowl (eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

On the basis of this framework, one is able to pursue theological enterprises (and moral and political enterprises) without sacrificing the crucial elements of the otherwise indispensable discourses of the day.

Thinking theologically in this manner is, in many respects, a task that awaits us, for James's own reflections are primarily propaedeutic rather than fully substantive – even as metaphysics (not to mention as philosophy of religion or theology). Additionally, there are many critical discourses that must be factored into such metaphysical reflections, including in particular the sensitive and deep understandings of the social mechanisms of gender, race, ethnicity, and class that have been developed over the last decades. This enterprise, then, needs much work before it can demonstrate its degrees of fruitfulness beyond mere promise.

While radical empiricism is, I think, extraordinarily well suited to help us think through pressing theoretical issues while retaining crucial elements of our current commitments, theological and otherwise, it is nonetheless clear that, from a Jamesian perspective, not all insights – theological or religious in particular, but also others of our cherished views as well – will necessarily pass "rational" muster (in the intimate, balanced sense James puts forward). This is evidenced most clearly in James's discussion of the finite God in *A Pluralistic Universe*, where he finds that, on rational grounds, the theologically "traditional" transcendent God who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and otherwise "absolute" cannot be made sense of metaphysically within or in relation to the world of pure experience.[98] Embracing such a radical, fallibilistic pluralism and embarking on the task of doing theology in the context of metaphysical thinking thus requires facing the risk that something real is at stake, and that it is likely that, as James says, "when the cup is poured off . . . the dregs are left behind forever."[99]

The advantage gained by the risk is that, both theologically and philosophically, we are rendered as internal parts of the world of pure experience, potentially related to the higher and lower, contributing to the remedying of the world – should that happen – by adding our action to that of the other powers involved, the divine among them. "The incompleteness of the pluralistic universe, thus assumed and held to as the most probable hypothesis," James writes, "is also represented by the pluralistic philosophy as being self-reparative through us, as

[98] See James, *Pluralistic Universe*, pp. 143–4. [99] James, *Pragmatism*, p. 142.

getting its disconnections remedied in part by our behavior."[100] Whether or not we share James's unyielding optimism, we dare not avoid the call to contribute our might – philosophically, theoretically, theologically – to the amelioration of our world. "Believe truth! [or] Shun error"?[101] *Sapere aude*![102]

[100] James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 148. [101] James, *Will to Believe*, p. 24.

[102] Kant, "An Answer to the Question 'What is Enlightenment?,'" *Political Writings*, 2nd enlarged edition, Hans Reiss (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 54. The phrase is often translated "dare to know," but may also be rendered "dare to be wise," a translation more amenable to James's practical construal of knowledge.

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